

LIBERIAN STUDIES JOURNAL

Edited by:

Svend E. Holsoe,
University of Delaware

Frederick D. McEvoy,
Marshall University

African Art Stores, Monrovia. (Photo: Jane J. Martin)

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THE LIBERIAN ECONOMY IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY:

THE STATE OF AGRICULTURE AND COMMERCE

M. B. Akpan

Of the many problems that beset the Liberian government in the nineteenth century, the most grave was perhaps the chronic penury of its treasury. This penury made it difficult to effect development in important areas like education, transport, communication and defence. It inhibited government efforts to occupy Liberia's territories effectively to prevent encroachment by European colonial powers; and to implement a liberal or beneficent policy towards Liberia's indigenous African population. Yet writers¹ on Liberia, although conscious of the significance of the poverty of the Liberian government, have made largely perfunctory attempts to examine the nature and constituents of the Liberian economy in the nineteenth century, the sources of government revenue, and the causes of the poverty of the government's treasury. Had J. B. Webster and A. A. Boahen in their otherwise excellent book on West Africa made such an examination, they could not, after discussing the state of agriculture and trade in Liberia between 1830 and 1900, and what profits were made by the "Americo-Liberian merchant-Princes" who engaged in them, have concluded that:

Compared with the later period, the era of prosperity [of the merchant-princes] from 1850-1880 was one of relative peace between settlers and Africans. Merchant-princes operated interior trading posts and by cooperating with the chiefs, maintained Liberian influence, while the government occasionally paid subsidies to the

1. These writers include G. W. Brown, *THE ECONOMIC HISTORY OF LIBERIA* (Washington, 1941); Doris D. Grimes, "The Economic Development of Liberia" unpublished M.A. Thesis, New York University, 1962; J. B. Webster and A. A. Boahen, *HISTORY OF WEST AFRICA: THE REVOLUTIONARY YEARS - 1815 TO INDEPENDENCE* (New York, 1970).

chiefs to keep the trade routes open to the coast. The depression and collapse of the merchant-princes in the 1880's brought a decline in government revenue, yet the patronage policy of the one party state and European border encroachments necessitating effective interior rule called for large government expenditure.²

This conclusion implies, erroneously, that between 1850 and 1880 the Liberian government had substantial funds at its disposal, derived, presumably, largely from commerce. It also mistakenly equates wealth earned from trade by the Liberian merchants during that period to revenue that reached the coffers of the government in that period. This paper attempts to examine a part of this question, namely the state of agriculture and commerce in Liberia in the nineteenth century.

LIBERIAN AGRICULTURE: ITS RELATIVE NEGLECT UP TO THE 1870'S

Liberia's potential for agricultural development is considerable. Situated within the tropical forest zone, Liberia is a rolling country with a good share of rivers, hills, and low mountain-ranges. There are two principal seasons: the rainy season (May to October), and the dry season (November to April). The yearly rainfall averages from 120 to 130 inches along the coast, decreasing to about seventy inches in areas farther inland; while the temperature ranges between sixty and one hundred degrees Fahrenheit.³ This soil is fertile: by 1822, when Afro-American immigrants commenced to settle in Liberia, coffee and cocoa trees grew wild but abundantly in her forests. About 1831, a settler noted that some coffee trees "that have been suffered to stand in the gardens and taken care of prove more prolific than in the West Indies."⁴

The African population practised mainly subsistence agriculture. The crops cultivated included plantain, bananas, yams, rice, corn, cotton, cassava, beans, vegetables, and fruits, all of which were well

2. Webster & Boahen, HISTORY OF WEST AFRICA, 158.

3. Liberian Bureau of Information, Department of State, INVEST, TRADE, AND PROSPER WITH LIBERIA (Monrovia, undated), 7; Harry H. Johnston, LIBERIA. Reprinted (London, 1961), 12.

4. AFRICAN REPOSITORY (Hereafter, AR), VII (1831), 260.

adapted to the Liberian soil and climate. Some livestock like sheep, cattle, goats, and fowls were also kept. However, as the prevailing method was "slash-and-burn" farming and shifting cultivation, which is rather wasteful, the crop yield was generally low. It hardly sufficed the needs of the African and settler communities, or for exports that could yield revenue to the Liberian government. Thus by the end of the nineteenth century, rice, the staple food of the African population, who cultivated it in substantial quantities, was one of Liberia's major imports for consumption by settlers (many of whom in any case preferred American, to Liberia rice) and the Africans alike.⁵

The relative neglect of agriculture that occurred up the 1870's among the Americo-Liberians - as the Afro-American settlers preferred to call themselves - did not imply an absence of inducements to farming. The Directors of the American Colonization Society, which founded Liberia in 1822, were cognizant of Liberia's potential for agriculture, and of the importance to the perpetuation of the colony of the settlers possessing their own adequate sources of food supply. They accordingly sought to attract the settlers to agriculture. Each immigrant was allocated besides a quarter acre town lot on which to build his house, fifteen acres farmland in the neighbourhood of the town to cultivate for his subsistence. Immigrants who wished to make farming a career and opted to settle at a distance from the town were allocated up to fifty acres of land.⁶ Besides, after the settlers proclaimed their country's independence from the Society in 1847, they declared such territories of their Republic as were not actually occupied by the African population to be state property which any Liberian (settler or African) could purchase at the minimum price of fifty cents an acre. It also became the practice for the Liberian government occasionally to make land grants to soldiers who had fought in wars with the African population. All this placed sufficient land at the disposal of the settlers, sometimes even at the expense of displacing the Africans from their town sites.

Indeed, Liberia's early white Governors, realizing the precariousness of the colony depending for its food supply on the neighbouring African peoples, who might withhold supplies or inflate prices in times of hostility, constantly exhorted the settlers to devote their time to agriculture. One of them, Jehudi Ashmun (1822-1828), tirelessly urged them that farming was "the surest of all the means of plenty and inde-

5. Johnston, *LIBERIA*, 339.

6. AR, VI (1830), 103-104.

pendence" of a community,⁷ and indeed wrote a handbook on Liberian agriculture, which, he also assured, could guide them to "independence and domestic comfort." Besides, about 1836, the colonial government established a model farm on Bushrod Island, opposite Monrovia, intended "to supply specimens for agriculture," and to demonstrate to the settlers effective methods of farming.⁸

Yet for about four decades after the establishment of Liberia, most of the Liberian settlers spurned agriculture. The few who engaged in it, mostly in rural, Liberian settlements like Caldwell and Clay-Ashland, were up to the early 1850's concerned more with the simpler work of keeping some cattle, sheep, and fowls, and cultivating gardens of mostly sugarcane, sweet potatoes, tobacco, beans, vegetables, corn, peas, and fruits, than with cultivating large farms or plantations of these crops or of others like cotton, cocoa and coffee.⁹

Yet the reasons for this apathy among most Americo-Liberians for agriculture, which prevailed up to the early 1870's, were not far to seek. The majority of them being newly emancipated slaves, who had in servitude in America been used to being forced to work, erroneously equated their newly won freedom with abstinence from labour. Hence, although the majority of them had been agricultural or unskilled labourers in America, in Liberia, many of them would not of their own volition exert themselves beyond what was necessary to maintain a subsistence, however precarious this might be.¹⁰

Besides, the Liberian settlers remained, understandably, deeply attached to American tastes in food. Many of them accordingly paid only scant interest to African foodstuff like cassava, plantain, yams, palm oil, sweet potatoes, eddoes, and local vegetables. Instead, they imported much foodstuff from America, such as flour, corn meal, butter, lard, pickled beef, fish, pork, bacon, Irish potatoes, and garden vegetables from foreign seeds. Of course, some of these, like Irish potatoes and certain varieties of peas and vegetables were not adaptable to Liberian soil and climate, even if Liberians had early shown inclination

7. Ashmun to Board of Managers of the American Colonization Society (hereafter ACS), December 31, 1825, AR, I (1826), 82.

8. AR, XIV (1838), 4; COLONIZATION JOURNAL (hereafter MCJ), 111 (1845), 43.

9. Brown, ECONOMIC HISTORY, 116; AR, VII (1831), 200; James W. Lugenbeel, SKETCHES OF LIBERIA (Washington, 1850), 25.

10. AR, VII (1831), 258.

to cultivate them.¹¹ Indeed, not infrequently, some Americo-Liberians returned to America for good largely because they would not find in Liberia all the food they had been used to in America. About 1857, for instance, one settler, Jeff Waters, who had returned dissatisfied to America, alleged, apparently in an oblique reference to yams, cassava, and sweet potatoes, that there was no food in Liberia "except roots." Another settler, Moses Croston, who similarly returned dissatisfied to America in 1883, after almost four years residence in Liberia, gave as a reason for his return that "one cannot get [in Liberia] the things he was accustomed to eat in the United States, only roots and roots, and scarcely any fresh meat."¹² This distaste among many of the Liberian settlers for African foods was hardly compatible with enthusiasm for agriculture.

The settlers' attitude in this regard was hardened by the fact that owing to the luxuriance of the Liberian forest, and the scarcity of oxen and horses, which almost precluded the use of the plough,¹³ farming in Liberia had to be carried on largely by methods different from what the settlers had been used to in America, viz: clearing the bush and felling trees with machetes; burning the bush thus cleared; making ridges with hoes; and frequent weeding. For these tasks the tools and equipment at the disposal of the settlers were quite often unsuitable or inadequate. Most of them were provided by the Directors of the American Colonization Society, who were largely ignorant of the demands imposed on the method of cultivating the soil by conditions in Liberia. Thus the Society's Agent in Liberia between 1850 and 1876, Henry W. Dennis, often complained that a "good proportion" of the tools provided was unsuitable, and that those that were suitable did not suffice. On two occasions, he specifically recommended "stout hilling hoes" and "some few grubbing hoes" in place of "light and delicate weeding hoes" that had been sent; "strong rakes" instead of "bill hooks;" and more axes and hatchets, which were suitable, but only a small quantity of which had previously been provided.¹⁴ Similar

11. Ashmun to Board, Nov. 28, 1827, AR, IV (1828), 16; Dr. James Hall, "My First Visit to Liberia," AR, LXII (1886), 7; Ellis to Secretary of State, Nov. 27, 1904, Consular Despatch No. 84, Despatches of United States Consuls in Liberia, U.S. National Archives, Washington (hereafter DUSC), Roll 7.

12. Phillips to Coppinger, Dec. 26, 1883, ACS, Liberian Letters, Library of Congress, Washington (hereafter Liberian Letters), XXI.

13. AR, VI (1830), 104.

14. Dennis to McLain, Nov. 24, 1868, Liberian Letters, XIV; Dennis to Coppinger, Aug. 5, 1874, Liberian Letters, XVII.

recommendations were made to the Directors of the Society as late as 1896 by Professor O.F. Cook of the Liberia College. He contrasted American with Liberian farming by pointing out that with a few exceptions the crops were all different; that in Liberia plows and harrows were almost useless, as for most crops plowing was unnecessary; and that although horse-tools might be used for some farming operations, they would have to be specifically made.¹⁵ Certainly, the problems of finding suitable tools, and of adapting new crops, side by side with the tedium of felling thick, tropical forests could have failed to daunt the spirit of only the few Liberians really determined to make a career of farming.

Besides, not only did the settlers as a rule dislike manual labour, but also many of them who were mulatto or mixed blood went as far as to contend that since it appeared that the Liberian climate and malaria told more on them than on the settlers of darker complexion, the latter should engage in agriculture and the mechanical arts, while they (the mulattoes) should be employed in the government and commerce, which required little physical exertion.¹⁶ This contention tended to add to the prevailing opprobrium attaching to agriculture as a profession, since for several decades after Liberia was founded it was quite obvious that government and commerce were more remunerative than agriculture.

Most of the settlers of darker complexion who chose farming as a career were slaves manumitted specifically for colonization in Liberia. They were too poor to make a tangible success of plantation agriculture which demanded investment of substantial capital in procuring seeds, plants and machinery, and for payment of incomes of labourers.

From all this, we might conclude that with but few exceptions, Liberia's economy between 1822 and the early 1860's benefitted little from the settlers' contribution to agriculture. Rather, much revenue was expended on the procurement of foreign foodstuff that tilted the balance of trade to Liberia's disfavour, and adversely affected the Liberian economy.

15. O.F. Cook, "Who should go to Liberia?," BULLETIN, No. 9 (November 1896), 5.

16. Webster and Boahen, HISTORY OF WEST AFRICA, 154; Abayomi Karna, HISTORY OF LIBERIA (Liverpool, 1926), 26.

LIBERIAN TRADE: ITS PRIMACY UP TO THE 1870'S

In the final analysis, perhaps the greatest bane of agriculture among the Americo-Liberians was the mania for trade¹⁷ which up to the early 1870's seemed to grip almost every settler. Not until this mania subsided in the last decades of the century did agriculture receive the attention it deserved.

Not that the background or the resources of most of the settlers particularly qualified them for trade. Only a few of them like Edward J. Roye and Lewis Sheridan had emigrated to Liberia with substantial funds, or had engaged in trade in America. Rather, particularly as far as the "country traffic" was concerned, capital of even a few hundred dollars sufficed to invest in the trade goods and wares needed for the trade, and profits could accrue as well from the ability of the settler to drive a good bargain with the Africans in bartering his trade goods for African produce, which he subsequently shipped for sale abroad, or sold to European merchants on the coast, as from a less discreet investment of large capital.

Moreover, unlike agriculture which was toilsome and might take several years to yield any profits, the rewards of trade could be speedy to the settler who bargained shrewdly, and trade required only moderate labour. Thus in 1831, a new settler observed that swarms of Liberians were "eager in the pursuit of traffic" and was astonished to discover "what little time is necessary to qualify even the youngest, to drive as hard a bargain, as any roving merchant from the land of steady habits, with his assortment of tin-ware, nutmegs, books, or dry goods."¹⁸

This trade or "traffic," as it was popularly known, was many faceted: it comprised the "country traffic," the "coast-wise trade," commission business, and trade with neighbouring colonies, particularly Sierra Leone, and with Europe and America.

The "country traffic" comprised a two-way movement of Liberian traders bearing an assortment of goods such as tobacco, gun-powder, fire-arms, salt, cotton-cloth, iron pots, beads, and rum into African villages in the Liberian interior where they bartered them for African

17. AR, VII (1831), 236-237, 259.

18. P. J. Staudenraus, THE AFRICAN COLONIZATION MOVEMENT 1816-1865 (New York, 1961), 153-154.

products like palm oil, rice, camwood, ivory, hides, gold, and tortoise shells; and of Africans bringing their own products to the Liberian settlements to barter for European goods.¹⁹

To promote this traffic, the Liberian government, many of whose leaders were themselves merchants, concluded at various times treaties with the African chiefs in the Liberian hinterland by which they placed their territories under the jurisdiction of the Liberian government²⁰ in return for its protection and certain presents. The chiefs undertook to check the activities of African middlemen, and to keep the paths open to trade and travel to both Liberian and African traders. Similar treaties were made by the Governors of the sister colony of Maryland-in-Liberia, which eventually in April 1857 joined the Republic of Liberia as her fourth county.

As these treaties made some of the paths tolerably safe for travelling and clear of middlemen, the number of Liberians engaged in trade in the interior and of Africans, particularly Mandingo, bringing their wares and products to the Liberian settlements for sale increased considerably. In July 1832, for instance, the colonial Agent, Joseph Mechlin (April 1829-July 1832), reported that Monrovia was becoming "a place of resort for natives from the Condo country and countries beyond, bordering on Fouta Jallon," and that the Mandingo were visiting the

19. Ashmun to Board, Nov. 28, 1827, AR, IV (1828), 21; AR, VI (1830), 99.

20. Some chiefs, however, denied claims by the Liberian government that they had consented to come under Liberia's political jurisdiction. See Ashmun to Board, Nov. 28, 1827, AR, IV (1828), 21; Mechlin to Gurley, April 1832, AR, VIII (1832), 132; Roberts to Gurley, March 1843, AR, XIX (1843), 74; Svend E. Holsoe, "A Study of Relations between Settlers and Indigenous Peoples in Western Liberia, 1821-1847," *AFRICAN HISTORICAL STUDIES*, IV, 2 (1971), 344-349; "Journal of a Tour of Governor Russwurm and Mr. Stuart to the Suareekai, Toboe, and Bolobo countries," MCJ, 11 (1844), 154-160; Russwurm, "Memoranda of a Jaunt to Denah on the Cavally River in December, 1844," Cape Palmas, June 1845, MCJ, 111 (1846), 198-203; Russwurm to Latrobe, Dec. 30, 1845, MCJ, 111 (1846), 146, 161-168. The Liberians were George Seymour and Levin Ashe (in 1858); Benjamin J. K. Anderson (in 1868-1869, and in 1874); and William Spencer Anderson (in 1870).

colony "in considerable numbers."²¹ In January 1838, Dr. Goheen, the Colonial Physician, similarly reported that Monrovia was "continually overflowing" with African traders who came "in companies of fifties" from the interior for the barter trade.²²

However, some Liberians engaged in the "country traffic" also took part in the "coast-wise trade." They bartered European goods for African products at various African villages along the Liberian coast in vessels owned by themselves averaging from ten to thirty tons burden, many of which were built in Liberia by Liberians, and piloted by Liberian captains. Indeed, the gradual increase in the number of Liberian owned boats was indicative of the expansion of this trade and of the substantial profits that many Liberians reaped from it. In August 1834, nine small, Liberian vessels were engaged in this trade, besides two which were then building.²³ By 1838, the number had risen to fifteen.²⁴ About the middle of 1868, twenty-five schooners "besides numerous small crafts," owned by Liberians were engaged in the trade (in addition to three brigs trading with Europe and America);²⁵ while in January 1875, Liberian merchants owned fifty-four vessels, at least two of which were built in the United States at costs of \$11,000 and \$15,000 respectively.²⁶

African products procured through the "country traffic" and the "coast-wise trade" constituted Liberia's principal exports up to the early 1870's. At least three of these exports were Liberia's specific contributions to West African trade. To the palm oil, which had early been exported especially from the Kru coast, was added in 1848 the palm kernel through the efforts and ingenuity of Senator S. S. Herring of Grand Bassa, a coffee planter and merchant, who through a machine he invented, proved that the oil from the palm kernel could be a profitable article of commerce, and thus introduced the palm kernel to the world market.²⁷ In 1881, he further discovered the raffia from the piassava

21. Mechlin to Board, July 13, 1832, AR, VIII (1832), 135.

22. Goheen to Bangs, Jan. k, 1838, AR, XIV (1838), 88; AR, XL (1864), 187.

23. AR, X (1834), 210.

24. AR, XIV (1838), 61.

25. James to Coppinger, July 24, 1868, Liberian Letters, XIV; ACS, FIFTY-SIXTH ANNUAL REPORT, January 1873, 17-18.

26. AR, LI (1875), 126.

27. E. W. Blyden, A CHAPTER IN THE HISTORY OF LIBERIA (Freetown 1892), 4; LIBERIAN RECORDER (Nov. 23, 1899); Herring to Coppinger, Jan. 23, 1881, Liberian Letters, XX. A parallel discovery of the potentiality

palm, which he called "flax from the leaf of the palm tree" or "fibre," and which he commenced to ship to England.²⁸ And in the 1880's, Liberians too discovered the piassava and commenced to export it to Europe.²⁹ As the nineteenth century progressed, hides and rubber were added to the exports of Liberia, besides agricultural produce like coffee, sugar, cocoa, cotton, and ginger.

A few Liberian owned ships bearing the Liberian flag carried these exports to, and did business at, Freetown and, as from the 1850's, even at ports in Europe and America. In the late 1820's one of them had cost its owner, Francis Devany, then High Sheriff of Liberia, \$1,000: while another cost its owner \$6,000.³⁰ In the late 1860's, the three Liberian owned brigs engaged in trade abroad were said to belong respectively to Edward J. Roye of Monrovia, H. L. Crusoe of Grand Bassa, and the Monrovia firm of McGill Brothers.³¹ Liberians who did not own vessels could import or export goods in foreign vessels visiting their country, or in ships which brought emigrants several times yearly from America.³²

Some Liberians like Governors Roberts and Russwurm, Henry Cooper, George McGill, Francis Devaney, Colston M. Waring, W. F. Nelson, and James J. Cheeseman, engaged in the "coast-wise trade" or in the "country traffic," also acted as commission merchants. They built

of the palm oil was perhaps made in Sierra Leone in the early 1800's by a Swede, Adam Afzelius, an employee of the Sierra Leone Company. The oil was, however, not exploited commercially till 1846 when a Sierra Leone merchant, Charles Heddle, commenced to export it to Europe. See C. Fyfe, *A HISTORY OF SIERRA LEONE* (London, 1963), 239, 258.

28. Herring to Coppinger, Jan. 23, 1881. Senator Herring was a remarkably ingenious man. On account of the several machines he had invented, or rather improvised, the Liberian Legislature in December 1874 formally conferred on him the designation "Inventor" and voted him a premium of 100 acres of land.

29. Johnston, *LIBERIA*, 408.

30. AR, IV (1828), 14.

31. James to Coppinger, July 24, 1868, *Liberian Letters*, XIV.

32. Brown, *THE ECONOMIC HISTORY OF LIBERIA*, 141; Hanson to Seward, Aug. 16, 1864, *Diplomatic Despatch No. 24*, *Despatches of United States Ministers at Monrovia* (hereafter DUSM), Roll 1.

warehouses at the Liberian ports where they stored trade goods consigned to them by foreign merchants and business houses, and sold them on the condition that they were given a commission, that is, a portion of the value of the sales.³³

Besides the Liberians, American and European merchants too carried on considerable trade along the Liberian coast even before Liberia was founded, some of them having leased land from the African chiefs on which they built trading factories. In July 1847, for instance, British merchants were said to own forty factories on the Liberian coast,³⁴ and up to the last decades of the nineteenth century, they constituted the majority of the foreign merchants in Liberia. Certain European firms like A. Woermann and Company, and Wiechers and Helm, of Hamburg; and H. Muller and Company, and Oost Afrikanssche Cie. of Rotterdam also did very substantial business in Liberia especially during the second half of the nineteenth century. They owned trading factories at Liberian ports,³⁵ and made substantial profits. These merchants and firms had the advantage over Liberian merchants of bigger vessels and larger capital, and early gave Liberians stiff competition in the coast-wise and foreign trade. Thus about December 1843, Governor Roberts complained against their system of crediting the chiefs and headmen along the coast "large amounts, endeavouring by this means to obtain their influence and prejudice them against colonial traders, who are not willing if they were able to waste their property in this way."³⁶

Faced with such competition, and some shipwrecks, it is not surprising that many Liberians failed at trade, especially, as mentioned earlier concerning the "country traffic," only the astute bargainer could hope to gain substantially from the barter trade with the African peoples.³⁷ Nevertheless, some Liberians did achieve striking success in

33. Page to Secretary of the Navy, April 9, 1832, AR, VIII (1832), 141; AR, IX (1833), 158; AR, XLIII (1886), 3.

34. Murray to Hothman, July 18, 1847, F.O. 47/1, Public Record Office, London.

35. King to Coppinger, Jan. 14, 1883, AR, LIX (1883), 75; Smyth to Davis, May 4, 1882, DUSC, 2/30; Smith to Hill, Oct. 26, 1900, DUSC, 6/22; E. W. Blyden, *THE PROBLEMS BEFORE LIBERIA* (Monrovia, 1909), 6-7; Johnston, *LIBERIA*, 290.

36. Roberts, Message to the Legislature of the Colony," AR, XIX (1843), 181.

37. AR, VI (1831), 259; Blyden, *PROBLEMS BEFORE LIBERIA*; Mechlin to Board, March 20, 1830, AR, VI (1830), 55-56.

trade, such as Colston M. Waring, who had acted for several months in 1828 as Vice Governor of Liberia, and during 1830 alone sold goods to the tune of \$70,000;³⁸ Francis Devany, who had commenced trade in 1823 with only \$200 earned while employed by Ashmun as Captain of a small colonial vessel that plied the Liberian coast for food supplies, and possessed by May 1830 property estimated at \$20,000, and during 1830 sold goods to the value of between \$24,000 and \$25,000;³⁹ Presidents Joseph J. Roberts (1748-1856, 1872-1876), James S. Payne (1868-1870, 1876-1878), Stephen A. Benson (1856-1864), Daniel B. Warner (1864-1868), Edward J. Roye (1870-1871),⁴⁰ Dr. Samuel Ford McGill and Gabriel Moore of Monrovia; Senator J. M. Horace of Buchanan; H. Lafayette Crusoe of Edina, reputed about 1882 to be "the most successful merchant in Liberia," having business connections with Liverpool, Manchester, Hamburg, and New York, and whose agricultural and mercantile business in Liberia employed about three hundred persons;⁴¹ and Reginald A. Sherman, Brigadier-General of the Liberian Army, who was reputed in the late 1880's and early 1890's to be doing the largest, commercial business in Liberia. He owned one of the largest stores in Monrovia, and conducted a lucrative trade with England, France, Germany, and the United States through the New York firm of Yates and Porterfield, from whom several vessels with cargoes of American goods were annually consigned to him. And he had, besides three seacoast sailing crafts, fifteen or more cargo boats used in conveying merchandize to and from steamers lying off the Liberian coast.⁴²

These merchants were enabled by their wealth to live a luxurious life. They built themselves palatial mansions, bought expensive furniture from abroad, wore expensive dress, and ate mainly expensive imported food. Moreover, they could afford the resources to engage actively in Liberian politics, and for the greater part of the nineteenth century, they constituted the ruling class in Liberia.⁴³

Indeed, the briskness of trade in Liberia was not much dissimilar to the situation in neighbouring Sierra Leone, which had many parallels in her foundation and development with Liberia. There, the early

38. AR, VII (1830), 98.

39. IBID.

40. AR, XLVIII (1872), 186, 343; AR, LII (1876), 211.

41. Smyth to Davis, Oct. 27, 1882, DUSC, 4/76.

42. BULLETIN, No. 6 (Feb. 1895), 1-2.

43. M. B. Akpan, "Colour and Culture Conflict in Nineteenth Century Liberia," unpublished manuscript.

settlers, and latterly, the Recaptured Africans, what with insufficiency of land, largely neglected agriculture for most of the nineteenth century in preference for trade which yielded quicker profits and demanded less toil.⁴⁴

From the early 1880's, however, the extent of participation of Liberian settlers in their country's trade began to decline. Already, in December 1877, President Payne had noted that the trade was "falling into the hands of the few who by their enterprise and business habits, show themselves qualified to manage it advantageously," and that Liberians generally were realizing that it was "safer to invest their means in the earth."⁴⁵ By the early 1900's, Liberian trade had fallen largely into the hands of Europeans, particularly Germans, and Liberians became at best "factory men" and small shopkeepers at branch stores of the Europeans.⁴⁶ Symptomatic of this decline was the virtual disappearance by the turn of the century of the Liberian merchant marine. In July 1900, a writer in the Liberian weekly, The Liberian Recorder, observed that it consisted of only "one solitary schooner," and that "that commercial thrift and activity which once pervaded the [Liberian] coast is now a thing of the past."⁴⁷ In September 1902, another writer was constrained to ask: "What has become of all those crafts that were once owned by Liberian traders? Where are all their stores and business houses with clerks, porters, and attendants? I guess you will say that they like their vessels and stores are all gone."⁴⁸

One reason for this situation could be traced to the introduction from the early 1850's of European owned steamships which provided regular and relatively low cost transport between England, Europe, and the West African coast, thereby enabling European traders, who would not have had sufficient capital to buy their own ships, to come out to West Africa for trade in addition to existing, large, European companies which owned their own trading vessels. The advent of the small scale traders exacerbated competition between Liberian and foreign merchants, especially as the steamers gave preference to their own nationals for freighting goods and produce.⁴⁹ Thus in

44. N.A. Cox-George, FINANCE AND DEVELOPMENT IN WEST AFRICA: THE SIERRA LEONE EXPERIENCE (London, 1957), 124-140.

45. James S. Payne, ANNUAL MESSAGE, 159-160.

46. Brown, ECONOMIC HISTORY OF LIBERIA, 159-160.

47. THE LIBERIAN RECORDER (July 19, 1900).

48. THE LIBERIAN RECORDER, V. No. 9 (Sept. 27, 1902).

49. Merran Fraenkel, TRIBE AND CLASS IN MONROVIA (London, 1964), 18; Brown, ECONOMIC HISTORY OF LIBERIA, 141-142; Sevier to Secretary of State, December 31, 1886, DUSC, 4/71.

November 1881, Charles T. O. King, himself a prominent Liberian merchant, noted that Liberian merchants "all along the coast" had "hard work to compete" with foreign merchants, "who being large capitalists can afford to do business to greater advantage."⁵⁰ Liberians, particularly those engaged in the coast-wise and foreign trade, who could not afford sufficient capital for this competition dropped out from the trade.

Besides, the majority of the prominent, Liberian merchants had been mulattoes, some of whom had received some training as artisans and craftsmen, and sometimes property from their white fathers. On emigrating to Liberia they assumed leadership in both political and economic spheres over immigrants of dark complexion, most of whom had been field slaves in America and less privileged.⁵¹ However, proportionally more mulattoes died from malaria and the Liberian climate than blacks. Thus although up to the late 1860's large numbers of mulattoes had settled in Liberia, by the late 1880's, mulattoes were estimated at only about two per cent of the settler population,⁵² and many prominent, mulatto families like the Roberts, the McGills, the Lewis, the Yates, and the Liles had become extinct, or were survived by middling heirs, and their property gone to ruin.⁵³ Albeit, with the death of Sherman in August 1895,⁵⁴ the era of the Liberian merchant princes was virtually ended.

In addition, the worldwide depression of trade of the 1880's and 1890's, which bankrupted many European traders, hurt the Liberians as well.⁵⁵ In December 1886, for instance, Charles T.O. King observed that it had "unfavourably affected" Liberia and that Liberian merchants had "endeavoured to contract rather than expand their business and are anxiously waiting for the revival of trade in Europe and America so that they may participate."⁵⁶

50. King to Coppinger, Nov. 23, 1881, Liberian Letters, XX.

51. Akpan, "Colour and Culture Conflict."

52. Blyden to Coppinger, Aug. 16, 1888; Nov. 17, 1888, Liberian Letters, XXV.

53. Akpan, "Colour and Culture Conflict;" Smyth to Davis, Oct. 27, 1882, DUSC, 4/76.

54. Heard to Olney, Sept. 2, 1895, DUSM, 11/94.

55. Webster and Boahen, HISTORY OF WEST AFRICA, 151.

56. A.C.S., SEVENTIETH ANNUAL REPORT, Jan. 1887, 10. Also H.R.W. Johnson, ANNUAL MESSAGE, Dec. 14, 1886; ANNUAL MESSAGE, Dec. 21, 1887; ANNUAL MESSAGE, Dec. 11, 1888.

Yet the decline of trade among the Liberian settlers was only a feature of the general contraction of Liberian trade that had actually commenced since the Liberian Legislature passed a "port of entry" law in February 1863 to restrict all commercial activity by foreign merchants to only designated ports of entry on the Liberian coast, where, it hoped, collection of customs duties would be more easily effected. Subsequently Liberian merchants although possessing a sizeable merchant marine could not supply all the trade along the Liberian coast relinquished by the foreign merchants, especially as the law also prohibited Liberian owned vessels engaged in trade abroad from participating in trade along the Liberian coast.⁵⁷ Many African villages that had been important centres of trade consequently lost their business.⁵⁸

Besides, during the last decades of the nineteenth century, some Liberian products were being replaced, or were facing unremitting competition in the world market by new substitutes: camwood and sugar cane, for example, by synthetic dyes and beet sugar.⁵⁹ Then, following the Scramble and Partition, European powers began to develop colonies in West Africa, on which they largely came to depend for tropical products. New patterns of trade consequently developed between these colonies and Europe which somewhat ignored Liberia⁶⁰ at a time when the Liberian settlers themselves were playing a decreasing role in their country's trade.

The United States of America, Liberia's "alma mater" and "best friend," having never taken much interest in promoting American trade with Liberia, failed in these circumstances to aid Liberia's trade despite pleadings by the Directors of the American Colonization Society and Liberian leaders that historical ties imposed on her a "moral duty" to do so.⁶¹ Thus as early as August 1842, Governor Roberts had expressed surprise at "what indifference the United States Government looked upon the African trade in contrast with the British and the French."⁶² In August 1856, Reverend John Seys, the American Consul in

57. See below for discussion of the port of entry law.

58. See below for African reaction to the law.

59. Baron H. de Lunden, "The Liberian Centenary," *AFRICAN AFFAIRS*, XLVII (1947), 208-209.

60. Webster and Boahen, *HISTORY OF WEST AFRICA*, 151-152.

61. King to Coppinger, Oct. 17, 1888, *Liberian Letters*, XXV; *BULLETIN*, No. 4 (Feb. 1894), 8-9.

62. Roberts to Board, Aug. 11, 1842, ACS, Despatches of Joseph J. Roberts.

Monrovia, had regretted that while his home Government seemed "determined to do nothing at all for Liberia," British trade with West Africa was benefiting from the introduction of regular steamships.⁶³ Indeed, in the late 1850's and early 1860's, the United States Government had apparently spurned proposals from the Liberian government for bilateral trade agreements that would reciprocally reduce tariffs. For in January 1860, President Benson charged that it had "refused to reply to communications" on the matter, and that there was "no use" to initiate further communications as "from what has passed within the past one and a half years," he had no reason to believe that the United States government would "deign to reply."⁶⁴ In the end, in February 1879, the Directors petitioned the American Congress to aid Liberia's trade by appropriating \$25,000 for construction of roads and a railway in the Liberian hinterland to facilitate the flow of products to the coast for export, and by establishing or subsidizing "a line of mail steamers" to ply monthly between the United States and Liberia.⁶⁵ Congress, however, failed to approve the petition and Liberia remained as before in lack of regular or adequate communication with America, much to the detriment of American-Liberian trade. This much was noted in December 1886 by S. S. Sevier, the American Consul at Monrovia, who wrote that although there was "a great demand for American goods in Liberia and her internal settlements," lack of steam communication between America and Liberia and inadequate demand in America for Liberia's raw products forced Liberian merchants "to carry on the greatest bulk of their trade with English manufacturers of Manchester and Liverpool."⁶⁶ American traders on the West African coast, also faced with transportation problems and increasing competition from Europeans, and finding Liberia too small a supplier by herself, began to turn attention to Latin America for tropical products.⁶⁷

In addition to all this, throughout the nineteenth century, there were no banks or satisfactory medium of exchange in Liberia to ease monetary transactions. Trade with the African population remained predominantly by barter. For other transactions there was a multiplicity of media, viz: the Liberian paper money, which continually depreciated in value; Liberian copper and silver coins, American and Mexican

63. Seys to Lugenbeel, Aug. 26, 1856, Liberian Letters, VII.

64. Benson to McLain, Jan. 21, 1860, Liberian Letters, X.

65. A.C.S., FIFTY-EIGHTH ANNUAL REPORT, January 1875, 15-16; AR, LV (1879), 51.

66. Sevier to Secretary of State, Dec. 31, 1886, DUSC, 4/71.

67. Webster and Boahen, HISTORY OF WEST AFRICA, 151-152.

dollars, the British pound, the Dutch ten guilder coin, the German mark, the French franc, and Spanish coins. All this rendered monetary transactions tedious and complicated. The Liberian Recorder noted in March 1901, that payment for imported European goods was "more often made in coffee, or other products of the country than in cash, which consequently tends to restrict commercial dealings to a large extent."⁶⁸

THE SUPERCESSION OF TRADE BY AGRICULTURE: THE 1870'S TO THE EARLY 1890'S

As trade thus declined, side by side with a reduction in funds given by American missionary bodies to aid educational and missionary work in Liberia, which had enabled many Liberians to become clergymen and school teachers, the avenues open to Liberians to make a living were mostly politics, law, and agriculture. Regarding the last, one might note that despite the apathy shown up to the early 1850's by most Americo-Liberians, a few Liberians like the Colonial Secretary, John N. Lewis, Judge Samuel Benedict, and Colonel Hicks had as from the early 1840's commenced some cultivation of coffee to supplement the predominantly garden-farming then practised by the Liberian settlers.⁶⁹ Their success, through much toil, gradually attracted other Liberians to coffee culture, so that from the early 1860's onward, there was a growing class of Liberian coffee planters. These included sons of merchants finding trade less profitable, some neighbouring African peoples, particularly the Kru, and successful merchants and professional men who wished to invest their surplus capital in new ventures or to find new pasttimes.⁷⁰ Among the leading planters could be named Presidents S.A. Benson, D.B. Warner, H-R.W. Johnson, and William D. Coleman; Senators Alfred B. King and Allen B. Hooper, Speaker of the House of Representatives William Spencer Anderson, H. L. Crusoe, June More and Solomon Hill.⁷¹ Their plantations were located predominantly in the basins of the Saint Paul's, the Saint John's and Sinou

68. THE LIBERIAN OBSERVER, IV, No. 2 (March 28, 1901).

69. Horatio Bridge, "Journal of an African Cruiser," MCJ, 111 (1843), 43-45. Also Warner to McLain, Dec. 31, 1850, Liberian Letters, IV.

70. AR, LIV (1876), 116-117; King to Coppinger, Oct. 21, 1891; Liberian Letters (uncatalogued); E.E. Smith, "A Report on Liberia," BULLETIN, No. 1 (Nov. 1892), 15.

71. Smith, "Report on Liberia."

Rivers.

For this growth in coffee culture, considerable credit attached to Edward S. Morris, an American merchant and philanthropist. He not only visited Liberia several times in the 1860's bringing out machines of his own invention for hulling and cleaning coffee to demonstrate to Liberians, but also, till his death late in the nineteenth century, he corresponded with Liberian coffee growers, giving them practical advice,⁷² and he purchased a great deal of coffee grown by them at a higher price than any other buyer.⁷³ Largely through him, Liberian coffee won speedy recognition in the world market. In 1876, at his initiative and expense, he represented the Liberian government at the American Centennial Exhibition at Philadelphia, where he exhibited Liberian products like coffee, sugar, arrow root, cocoa, ginger, and camwood, besides African manufactures like dugout canoes, a weaving loom, household furniture, and war horns made of ivory.⁷⁴ In October 1880, he acted as Liberia's special representative at the International Cotton Exhibition held in the state of Georgia, at which he displayed Liberian cotton and African made cotton cloths.⁷⁵

During the late 1850's and early 1860's too, over 5000 Recaptured Africans (about one third of the entire Liberian settler population) seized from slavers in the Atlantic waters by American naval ships, and landed in Liberia, where they were apprenticed for several years, if adults, or till twenty-one years of age if minors, to the families of the settlers, added very considerably to the agricultural labour of the Liberian planters,⁷⁶ both during, and after their apprenticeship, when they established their own homes in Liberia. Together with such labourers as the planters could engage from neighbouring Kru, Bassa, or Gola peoples, the Recaptives cleared and prepared the farm for coffee and sugar planting, and in some instances, their masters trained them to hull and clean the coffee for the market. Beginning as agricultural labourers, many Recaptives eventually became farmers, cultivating mostly plantains, cassava, eddoes, sweet potatoes,

72. Hoffman to Morris, Jan. 13, 1863, AR, XL (1864), 15-17, 317; ACS, FORTY-SEVENTH ANNUAL REPORT, January 1864, 12-13.

73. Morris to Coppinger, Nov. 29, 1882, ACS, Domestic Letters, 249.

74. AR., LII (1876), 116-118.

75. AR, LVIII (1882), 78.

76. A.C.S., FORTY-SEVENTH ANNUAL REPORT, Jan. 1864, 11. Also Stykes to McLain, Feb. 28, 1861, Liberian Letters, XI; Seys to Gurley, Dec. 5, 1860, AR, XXXVII (1861), 62.

yams, peanuts, and fruits, and some coffee, sugar, and cotton.⁷⁷

Besides, from 1869, there was a fundamental shift in the emigration policy of the American Colonization Society which proved of great importance to agricultural development in Liberia. Up to that year large numbers of mulattoes had been sent to Liberia along with emigrants of dark complexion. As noted above, however, the mulattoes apparently suffered more from the Liberian climate and malaria than emigrants of dark complexion. They essayed to preserve their health by avoiding hard, physical exertion, and by taking to commerce, the church and politics, all of which constituted a bane to agriculture.⁷⁸ From 1869, however, owing largely to pressure brought to bear on the Society by educated black Liberians,⁷⁹ it began to aid mostly "pure blacks" to settle in Liberia, most of whom, up to the late 1880's settled at Arthington and Brewerville, Montserrado County. Here, eschewing politics and trade, they devoted their energies to agriculture, planting both cash crops like coffee, sugar, cotton and ginger, as well as sweet potatoes, corn, eddoes, cassava, rice and plantains for domestic consumption or for sale at Monrovia.⁸⁰ Thus in January 1883, Arthington, founded only in December 1869, was reputed to have the largest coffee plantations in Liberia,⁸¹ and about ten years later, it was said to be "one extensive coffee orchard," and "perhaps the most flourishing Liberian settlement."⁸² Sturdy, self-reliant blacks like Solomon Hill, June Moore, and Alexander Cartwright, who had immigrated to Liberia in the early 1870's with only a few dollars in their pockets,

77. Seys to U.S. Secretary of Interior, Dec. 8, 1864, AR, LXI (1865), 15-18; U.S. Department of Interior, LIBERATED AFRICANS: LETTER OF ACTING SECRETARY OF INTERIOR, Jan. 1863, Enclosure, Seys to Smith, Dec. 23, 1861. Unlike in neighbouring Sierra Leone, the Recaptives in Liberia played a much less significant role in the political, social or economic life of Liberia which was dominated by the settlers who out-numbered them several times over and had already been entrenched in all spheres of Liberian life before the Recaptives arrived.

78. Akpan, "Colour and Culture Conflict."

79. A.C.S., SIXTY-NINTH ANNUAL REPORT, Jan. 1886, 8-9.

80. King to Coppinger, Nov. 10, 1881, Liberian Letters, XX.

81. IBID.; AR, LIX (1883), 63.

82. J. O. Wilson, "Settlement of Arthington," BULLETIN, No. 4 (Feb. 1894), 14.

and settled at Arthington and Brewerville, where they engaged in extensive coffee culture, were at the turn of the nineteenth century reputed to be the wealthiest men in Liberia.⁸³

To encourage agriculture, the Liberian government occasionally offered, particularly from the 1870's onward, several inducements to farmers to increase output. Already in December 1857, 1858, and 1860, it had instituted national fairs at which Liberian products and manufactures were exhibited and prizes awarded to those considered the most industrious. In December 1874, it commenced to offer premiums of several dozen dollars to coffee planters with 3,000 or more trees.⁸⁴ Owing to lack of funds, the offers ceased after a few years till they were restored in 1881,⁸⁵ for only two or three years. Nevertheless, in April 1878, it was reported that the policy of awarding premiums had given "fresh impetus to the planting of coffee, and increased the area of land devoted to that industry."⁸⁶ Besides, in January 1876, the Liberian legislature, seeking to attract foreign investment to Liberia and to raise revenue for paying Liberia's debts, modified the Liberian constitutional provision that barred foreigners from holding land in the Republic to allow them to lease land for from fifty to ninety-nine years for agricultural, business or commercial purposes, or for prospecting for minerals.⁸⁷ Subsequently, several American and British companies and merchants, including Edward S. Morris, leased land in Liberia on which they grew coffee for exports, and erected steam hulling machinery for preparing it for the market;⁸⁸ while some Liberian planters leased part of their land to foreign firms or merchants to plant coffee in partnership with themselves.⁸⁹

As the culture of coffee thus increased, coffee came to constitute Liberia's main export from the late 1870's to the early 1900's; export figures rising from less than 5,000 pounds in 1855 to about

83. BULLETIN, No. 11 (Nov. 1897), 81-82; BULLETIN, No. 17 (Nov. 1900), 83.

84. A.C.S., FIFTY-EIGHTH ANNUAL REPORT, Jan. 1876, 11-12.

85. Turner to U.S. Department of State, April 3, 1878, DISM, 7/301.

86. ACTS OF THE LIBERIAN LEGISLATURE, 1880-1881.

87. "An Act to encourage Agriculture and various products," ACTS OF THE LEGISLATURE, 1875-1876, approved Jan. 26, 1876.

88. Dennis to Coppinger, May 8, 1877, Liberian Letters, XVIII.

89. A.C.S., SIXTY-FIRST ANNUAL REPORT, Jan. 1878, 10.

3,000,000 pounds in 1896 as the following table shows:

TABLE I.

Year	Approximate quantity of coffee exported in pounds
1822-1830	nil ⁹⁰
1843	negligible ⁹¹
1855	5,000 ⁹²
1862	9,330
1865	23,400
1875	100,000
1885	800,000
1892	1,800,000
1896	3,000,000 ⁹³

Moreover, vast quantities of Liberian coffee seed and young coffee plants were imported by Sierra Leone, Gabon, Brazil, Ceylon, Costa Rica, Jamaica, Java, Natal, South Australia, and Venezuela, and planted with considerable success, as besides its unsurpassed flavour, Liberian coffee was hardy, grew where other species could not, yielded enormously, and resisted well the dreaded "leaf disease."⁹⁴ This increase in output and exports of Liberian coffee was aided by the high price it fetched both at home and abroad for most of the nineteenth century.⁹⁵ Indeed, the output could have been greater, and the quality and prices higher had modern methods been introduced both for cultivation of the coffee and its preparation for the market. Ultimately, poor preparation for the market in particular was to prove its bane.

Albeit, what success attained the cultivation of coffee was repeated in the cultivation of sugar, commenced from the early 1850's by some enterprising Liberians like Abraham Blackledge, and J. M. Richardson (at whose death in May 1857, his estate devolved on a young

90. AR, VI (1830), 101.

91. Bridge, "Journal of an African Cruiser," MCJ, 111 (1845), 44.

92. BULLETIN, No. (Nov. 1892), 15.

93. A.C.S., EIGHTIETH ANNUAL REPORT, Jan. 1897, 15.

94. Blyden, A CHAPTER IN THE HISTORY OF LIBERIA, 5-6; Blyden, The Africultural Problem in Liberia," AR, LI (1875), 107-108; AR, LIV (1878), 116-117.

95. A.B. King, "The Liberian Coffee," BULLETIN, No. 6 (Feb. 1895), 42.

Liberian, William S. Anderson). They all owned moderate cost steam sugar mills with which they manufactured syrup and sugar, first, for sale locally, and later for export abroad.⁹⁶ As sugar cultivation increased, industrious Liberians like Jesse Sharpe, Augustus Washington, R. H. Jackson, Henry W. Dennis, De Coursey, and Henry Cooper rose to make substantial fortunes. In August 1878, for instance, De Coursey and Sharpe, the most extensive planters in the St. Paul's River district, were each said to be manufacturing annually from 25,000 to 30,000 pounds of sugar, worth from five to six cents per pound at Monrovia.⁹⁷ Many of the planters being also merchants, owned their own boats with which they sold their sugar and syrup along the Liberian coast, or exported them to Sierra Leone, Europe and America. However, like coffee, some of the early sugar planters like John B. Jordan and L.L. Lloyd failed in business. Moreover, the output and exports of Liberian sugar could have been greater had Liberians possessed necessary technical knowledge, or used modern methods of cultivation and preparation for the market.

Besides coffee and sugar, Liberians also raised for export peanuts, indigo, cotton, cocoa, arrowroot and ginger; and for domestic consumption, sweet potatoes, rice, vegetables, corn and cabbages.⁹⁸ Thus in the last decades of the nineteenth century, wealth gained through trade and agriculture constituted the Liberian merchants and planters into the upper classes of Liberian society; while, as will be seen, the Liberian government gained some revenue from export duties on Liberian agricultural products exported abroad.

THE DECLINE OF THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR

Yet Liberian agriculture, like trade, faced increasing problems as the nineteenth century progressed. From the late 1880's, for instance, Liberian coffee faced mounting competition in the world market from better prepared coffee from Brazil, Java and Venezuela, which, side by side with the world-wide depression in trade, led to

96. Blackledge to Lugenbeel, May 8, 1852, Liberian Letters, V; Seys to Lugenbeel, Aug. 26, 1856, Liberian Letters, VII; D. B. Warner, "Address of President Warner at the formal Opening of the Steam Sugar Mill of L.L. Lloyd on the Saint Paul's River," AR, XL (1864), 296-297.

97. A.C.S., SIXTY-THIRD ANNUAL REPORT, Jan. 1880, 15.

98. MCJ, IX (1858), 147; A.C.S., FIFTY-FIFTH ANNUAL REPORT, Jan. 1872, 16. •

drastic fall in the price of Liberian coffee in the world market. Thus whereas in 1892, Liberian coffee had sold for eighteen cents per pound at Monrovia, in 1898 it sold for only six cents per pound.⁹⁹ Liberian sugar, facing similar competition in the world market, what with the development of beet sugar in Europe, also proved unremunerative to Liberian planters. Indeed the world-wide depression and consequent precipitous price fall was largely responsible for the collapse within a decade of the agricultural sector in Liberia.

These planters, moreover, were facing increasing shortage of labour. In October 1902, the Liberian Recorder noted that "the fine farms that once flourished on the Saint Paul's River" were "all going down for want of labourers."¹⁰⁰ Similarly, in December 1909, President Barclay observed that through "want of labour" one-third of the crop could not be picked and was being lost annually.¹⁰¹ In Montserrado County, for example, most of the labour for the great part of the nineteenth century had been supplied by the Gola, whose territory lay contiguous to the Liberian farms and plantations. About the turn of the century, however, the Gola themselves were raising their own coffee, cocoa, and cotton farms, and virtually ceased to offer their labour to Liberian planters. Other Africans like the Kpelle and Loma whose territories lay farther inland preferred to work on Liberian plantations only from October to December, when they returned home to look after their own farms, and were therefore not available for picking or hulling coffee for the planters between January and May. Moreover, inadequate remuneration of labourers bred resentment and exacerbated a dearth of labour; unscrupulous planters offered very low wages, or trumped up charges to dismiss labourers without payment when their work was almost done.¹⁰²

The fall in prices, side by side with shortage of labour, served to discourage Liberian planters. A.L.M. Gottschalk, an American visitor, observed during a visit in 1909 to the "coffee district" up the Saint Paul's River that "fully one out of every five coffee farms" which he saw was "abandoned and overgrown."¹⁰³ In the same year a United States

99. BULLETIN, No. 1 (1892), 83; Stevens to Wilson, Jne, 1898, Liberian Letters, XXVII.

100. THE LIBERIAN RECORDER, V, No. 10 (Oct. 25, 1902).

101. A. Barclay, ANNUAL MESSAGE, December 6, 1909.

102. IBID.

103. A. L. M. Gottschalk, A REPORT ON THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA, WEST AFRICA TO PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES (Aden, Arabia, Feb. 1909)

economic mission to Liberia noted that the coffee industry, which was once in a very flourishing state, was then "stagnant or retrograde."¹⁰⁴

Thus by the end of the nineteenth century, not only the participation of Liberians in trade but also their tillage of the soil, particularly as regards cash crops, had greatly diminished, and the hey-days of the Liberian merchant-planters passed away. Yet modern West Africa owes a debt to Liberia for the palm kernel, piassava, and raffia introduced by the Republic in those days as profitable articles of trade.

104. United States Department of State, REPORT OF THE COMMISSION OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA (Washington, Oct. 1909).

THE RISE AND DECLINE OF KRU POWER:
FERNANDO PO IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Ibrahim K. Sundiata

"... The Kroo man is the scavenger of the world. ... Mammon has used the Kroo man all these years."¹

INTRODUCTION

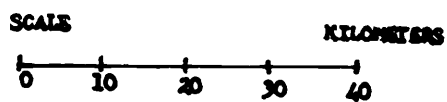
Kru laborers from southern Liberia were employed from the Senegambia to the Congo in the nineteenth century. Although the role played by Kru in maritime activities has been recognized, their impact on the areas in which they worked has yet to be fully analyzed. Also, although the Kru have received attention, the area of their greatest early nineteenth century impact has not. For the greater part of the last century and well into the twentieth, Kru labor was the mainstay of agriculture and other activities on the island of Fernando Po. In a very real sense the island may be viewed as an economic dependency of the Kru Coast. In the first half of the nineteenth century Kru labor was not only important in terms of manpower; it also threatened to rise to political dominance. In the second half of the century Kru labor no longer presented a potent political threat. Nevertheless, its importance increased as the island struggled to produce an export crop. Paradoxically, the increasing dependence of the island on Kru labor was matched by a diminution of Kru freedom of action in matters related to migration.

The wellsprings of Kru migration have their origins in conditions

1. Gordon Haliburton, *THE PROPHET HARRIS* (New York, 1973), 68, quoting J.E. Casely Hayford, *WILLIAM WADDY HARRIS* (London, 1915), 14.



WEST
BAY



MAP OF FERNANDO PO

in southern Liberia. Since at least the 1780's or 90's, the area had supplied seamen and stevedores for European vessels. It has been hypothesized that the "Kru" were the result of an amalgamation of related but distinct peoples--shore living "Fishmen" and inland agriculturalists or "Bushmen."² Early nineteenth century European writers speak of "Fishmen," "Bushmen," and "Kru," the first two names denoting geographical and occupational differences. Fishmen lived by the sea, from which they drew a large part of their sustenance, and attempted to monopolize trade with the interior. The Bushmen were those local inland peoples who depended mainly on agriculture. The third group, the early nineteenth century "Kru," is harder to identify. In 1810 the governor of Sierra Leone spoke of the "Krus" as those people living in five specific coastal towns: Little-kroo (in the north), Settra-kroo, Kroo-bah, Kroo-settra, and Will's Town. It has been hypothesized that "The furtherance of mutually sustaining social ties between neighboring Fishmen and Bushmen lineages over a number of generations would explain the linguistic, social, and cultural amalgam characteristic of the Kru Coast, one distinctive feature being the language (Krawin) spoken by inhabitants of the 'Five Towns' (Krao) and satellite communities."³ By the late nineteenth century the term "Kru" was applied to a series of related peoples inhabiting southern coastal Liberia. In addition to the Kru in the present Sinoe County, the Grebo of Maryland County were often included under the same designation. A writer at Fernando Po in the early twentieth century could generically speak of "Krooboyes" as "belonging to a tribe which lives between Capes Mesurado and Palmas."⁴

For most of the nineteenth century labor migration flowed from Sinoe and Maryland counties. However, just after the advent of the twentieth century, German labor concessionaires recruited extensively in Montserrado County among the Vai and other peoples. By this time the Kru, Bassa and Grebo reportedly did not like employment on Fernando Po because they preferred to be paid in British coins.⁵ The

2. George E. Brooks, Jr., *THE KRU MARINER IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY: AN HISTORICAL COMPENDIUM* (Newark, Del., 1972), 107ff.

3. *IBID.*, 78, 109.

4. José Gutierrez-Sobral, "The Outlook at Fernando-Po," *WEST AFRICA* (March 2, 1901), 334.

5. Public Records Office (London), Foreign Office 47/36, British Consul Errol MacDonell (Monrovia) to Principal Secretary for Foreign Affairs, November 27, 1903, and Foreign Office 47/36, Acting Consul W. Ring (Monrovia) to Principal Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, May 20, 1903.

Monrovia government's 1908 curtailment of labor recruitment from the northern Liberian counties again emphasized the traditional areas of recruitment, a situation which persisted until the end of labor migration in 1929.

THE RISE AND FALL OF KRU AUTONOMY

Kru are usually depicted as passive instruments of European commercial endeavor and Kru maritime activity is largely conceived of as interaction between themselves and their employers. However, Kru employment has another facet--that of interaction between stranger Africans and the local community. This was apparent on Fernando Po, a Spanish claimed island of approximately 800 square miles. On this island off the Cameroonian coast, the indigenes [the Bubi] are formerly non-iron using Bantu speakers who probably migrated from Gabon. They were joined in 1827 by a heterogeneous Eurafrican settlement on the island's northern coast. The British established an antislaving base, bringing artisans from Sierra Leone and laborers from the Kru Coast. In Clarence (the British settlement, which never numbered more than 1,500 inhabitants) the bulk of the workers were Kru and, when the British officially departed in 1834, Kru remained the mainstay of various European attempts at economic exploitations. In the late 1830's a visitor to the island saw a "company formed in England (the West Africa Company) employing about three hundred Kroomen ... for the purpose of cutting the timber, and bringing it home; it was cheaper to transport these men nearly two thousand miles to perform this work, than it was to employ the liberated Africans residing on the spot ..."⁶ In the early 1840's "Fishmen, Kroomen, Grand Drewin and St. Andrews men" were the major laboring force in an alien population that included Sierra Leoneans, Cape Coasters, Liberated Africans (mostly from Gabon and the Congo), Cameroonian and Calabar migrant laborers, and refugees from Principe and Sao Tome (mostly Congos).⁷ In 1841 there were 192 Kru in the Clarence settlement.⁸ In 1856, out of a total town population of 982, there were 380 transient workers, the majority of whom must have been Kru.⁹ Two years later Kru laborers

6. Henry Huntley, *SEVEN YEARS'S SERVICE ON THE SLAVE COAST* (London, 1860), I, 167.

7. Public Records Office (London), Colonial Office 82/9, John Clarke to the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, November 2, 1841.

8. *BAPTIST MISSIONARY HERALD* (September, 1841), 133.

9. Thomas Hutchinson, *IMPRESSIONS OF WESTERN AFRICA* (London, 1858), 180.

alone numbered 209.¹⁰ It must be realized that in the 1840's Fernando Po was, with the probable exception of Sierra Leone, the chief place of overseas employment for Kru. Also, the island was one of the few places where Kru accepted other than maritime employment. It was for this reason that an 1842 Parliamentary Committee saw the island as a possible model for long-term Kru employment in the West Indies.¹¹

The Kru in Clarence appear to have been a self-contained and self-conscious community. As in other cases, the laborers constituted a "Kru Town." Most of them lived without families, a Baptist missionary noting in 1841 that there were "150 Krous, who appear to live singly. ..."¹² This semi-permanent laboring community was often dimly viewed by those outside it. A Spanish missionary asserted that "robberies and other misdeeds are hardly known in Santa Isabel (Clarence) and they would even be entirely unknown if there were no Krumen, Portuguese and others from the nearby coast there."¹³ Ethnic boundaries were seldom traversed and the distinction between Liberated Africans, Sierra Leoneans and Krus was maintained. In one instance it was reported that a Kru, Ben Johnson, "built a good house and had it well supplied with furniture, dressed like the liberated Africans; and had one of them as his wife. Huntley [of the West African Company] was displeased at him for building a house in the town and not remaining at Kroo town, among his countrymen. He and his reputed wife were sent off the island."¹⁴

In European accounts the Kru emerge as capable, affable and loyal subordinates. Yet, as evidenced on Fernando Po, the Kru could, and did, assert their political and economic independence. On Fernando Po they were able to establish a recalcitrant 400 man encampment and to defy both their former employers and the indigenous population. This self-conscious assertion of migrant labor interests differs greatly from the traditional image of a loyally subservient work force and bespeaks a degree of cohesion above and beyond that temporarily imposed by the

10. Joaquín Navarro, APUNTES SOBRE EL ESTADO DE LA COSTA OCCIDENTAL DE AFRICA Y PRINCIPALMENTE DE LAS POSESIONES ESPAÑOLAS EN EL GOLFO DE GUINEA (Madrid, 1859), Apéndice G.

11. Testimony of Captain Henry Seward and Captain Thomas Midgley, PARLIAMENTARY PAPERS, 1842, 113-114, 237-238, cited by Brooks, KRU MARINER, 25.

12. BAPTIST MISSIONARY HERALD (September, 1841), 132.

13. Jerónimo Usera y Alarcón, MEMORIA DE LA ISLA DE FERNANDO PÓO (Madrid, 1848), 32.

14. Public Records Office (London), Colonial Office 82/9, John Clarke to the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, November 2, 1841.

discipline of European employment. Kru laborers were taken to Fernando Po through European agency, but, within a decade of their arrival, they had proven markedly refractory to European control.

In the 1860's, Richard Burton remembered that "some years ago they [the Kru] seized the north-west part of Fernando Po from the feeble Bubes [*sic*] plundered the people, carried off the women, and were defeated only by the combined actions of the natives [the Bubi] by land, and Governor Beecroft [of Clarence] who attacked them from the sea."¹⁵ This clash, which occurred in the 1840's, was the result of economic ties between Clarence and the island's interior. Soon after the arrival of the British it had been complained: "Our native laborers and Kroomen mixed with them [the Bubi] for the purpose of buying their yams and wine, so as very materially to retard their work, and it was not without some difficulty that we could keep our men separate."¹⁶ Tension between the Bubi and the newcomers was exacerbated by the trading propensities of the latter. Charges of extortion and abuse were frequently heard: violence became an ingredient in intergroup relations and occurred with increasing frequency. In 1832 it was noted: "The natives pay frequent visits to the colony, and however they deal out justice among themselves, are by no means backward in seeing it administered among the free negroes and Kroomen of Clarence."¹⁷ It often happened "that, in the scarcity of live stock, [immigrant Africans] unable to restrain their desire for more substantial food, and tired of their Indian corn, venture to help themselves to what the natives will bring them. Parties of these people are accordingly formed, who find their way to the huts of the natives in the interior, and steal their yams, goats, and sheep, or whatever they met with."¹⁸ Because of the development of a palm oil trade, the heterogeneous community inside the settlement was economically linked to a suspicious and cautious indigenous population outside. In the late 1830's the actions of the West Africa Company further aggravated the tensions inherent in the settler-native relationship. Friction within the colony between African workers and the Company caused Kru to desert Clarence and go off to North-West

15. Richard Burton, *WANDERINGS IN WEST AFRICA FROM LIVERPOOL TO FERNANDO PO* (London, 1863), II, 21-22.

16. Public Record Office (London), Colonial Office 82/1, William Owen to William Coker, November 8, 1827.

17. Richard Lander and John Lander, *JOURNAL OF AN EXPEDITION TO EXPLORE THE COURSE AND TERMINATION OF THE NIGER* (London, 1832), III, 302.

18. *IBID.*

Bay (San Carlos Bay) where some of them soon came into conflict with the local population. Fear of Kru unrest had already been expressed during the official British occupation, when the superintendent required merchants to post security for the repatriation of laborers.¹⁹ However, in spite of this precaution, the number of laborers from the Kru Coast continued to be high relative to the various other settler communities. In 1841 the number of Kru who had left Clarence for North-West Bay was estimated at 400.²⁰

Labor disputes in Clarence reverberated in the countryside; the disputes themselves were part of a pattern of chronic friction punctuated by truces. A Company agent at one point had a disagreement with the sawyers in his employ, after which an exodus of sawyers raised the wage by a shilling for those who did not leave. Soon it was agreed that all should get the new wage. Trouble erupted again when the sawyer's homes were broken into and they were charged with working for themselves on Company time. Again there was an exodus, which was somewhat alleviated when some were enticed back to Clarence at the end of 1840. Thirty-four returned and were given 2s.6d. per day for headmen, 2s.2d. for old sawyers and 1s. for younger hands. Disagreement flared anew when the men, assuming that they were working on a day basis, discovered that the Company wished to continue payments on the basis of the amount cut. A workers' protest was sent to the captain of the British ship "Wolverine," an action which enraged the Company's agent. Management sent two men after the three leading protestors, who, thinking the two had come in search of others, allowed themselves to be captured.

By 1841, the Kru who had escaped to North-West Bay had established their own political organization under a chief called Baffler. An attempt in the previous decade to dislodge them had failed and supposedly Baffler and his men were forcing the local fishing Bubi to supply them with fish and women.²¹ The Company took action against the Kru, managing to capture Baffler and transport him to Sierra Leone, while workers charged with stealing were imprisoned and a new headman appointed. In August of 1841 John Beecroft, the British-born head of the Clarence settlement, went to North-West Bay to offer new terms to re-

19. Public Records Office (London), Colonial Office 82/11, R.W. Hay to Nicholls, December 15, 1831.

20. Public Records Office (London), Colonial Office 82/9, John Clarke to the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, November 2, 1841.

21. Two attempts probably preceded this one.

maining recalcitrants.²² In this expedition, "All were warned that if they continued to behave ill...the Commander [Blount] would return and destroy their town and put them all to death."²³ Matters appeared to have been settled; seventeen Kru took positions on a steamer as seamen. However, the majority steadfastly refused to return while a particularly distasteful Company agent remained and the situation continued unsettled. In December of 1841 a Kru-Bubi clash took place around North-West Bay. Seven Kru and eleven Bubi died as the result of the Kru supposedly shooting a woman and destroying provisions.²⁴

In the following month it was reported that two Europeans, Dr. Henderson and Captain Irving, had gone to North-West Bay "to try to obtain Krumen."²⁵ But, in spite of this and other attempts, the Kru remained entrenched among their not so willing Bubi hosts. The authorities in Clarence attempted to interpose themselves between the two groups, with little success.²⁶ It was impossible to contain the Kru community; despite a prohibition on trading on the eastern side of the island, Kru traded there as well as in the northwest.²⁷ The Bubi did not welcome intrusions of any kind, but the Kru practice of living on the land was especially resented. In early 1845 a Bubi chief informed the people of Clarence that he would act justly towards them if they came to trade, but that great acts of cruelty had been committed by the Kru.²⁸ The skein of events was tangled; fragmentation and conflict of mutually antagonistic groups produced a period of internecine strife in which none of the competing groups viewed itself as safe from encroachment by the others. In late 1845 violence even broke out among the Krus themselves; at North-West Bay thirty were slain and one Kru leader, Jack Massey, appealed to Clarence for aid.²⁹ The dispute had begun when a woman belonging to Massey had not been restored to him as a result of a truce with another leader, Charley. When Massey finally went to demand her, her ears were cut off before his eyes and he was

22. Baptist Missionary Society (London), John Clarke, Vol. II (1st series), 429.

23. IBID.

24. IBID., 554.

25. IBID.

26. A Law of April 1843 provided penalties for those who dealt unjustly with the Bubi. Navarro, APUNTES, 146.

27. Baptist Missionary Society (London), John Clarke, Journal, Vol. II (2nd series), October 26, 1844, 302.

28. IBID., Vol. II (2nd series), 194.

29. IBID., Vol. III (2nd series), November 30, 1845, 129.

décapitated.

The disorders at North-West Bay brought forth the intervention of Clarence traders, who themselves wanted the trade of the area. In October of 1846 it was proposed to take all of the Kru at North-West Bay to Clarence as prisoners. When negotiations were opened, the Clarence people were met by a volley of musket fire. This enflamed passions against the Kru, who had already drowned a Fanti from Cape Coast and tortured a Bubi after first stealing his wife. After these alleged outrages, the Clarence citizenry set out to rid themselves of the Kru "menace." A force was raised and the rebel workers at North-West Bay at last expelled. However, their expulsion did not herald the withdrawal of strangers from the island's interior. Instead, it brought replacement of the Kru by Sierra Leonean and other black traders. Soon members of the Clarence community were attempting to settle at North-West Bay or to send trading representatives.³⁰ These filled the trading vacuum and initiated a similar policy of exactions: the demand for fish and women.

Conflict between the Kru and other communities was not solely the product of Kru cupidity and lack of good faith. Working conditions contributed greatly to labor unrest and the racial affinity of Kru and Liberated African did little to palliate relations between employee and employer. In the late 1830's an Englishman remarked that the Liberated Africans "had learned to read, and all it taught them was to set an untrue value upon themselves; so far from working if they could avoid it, they actually hired the Kroomen to work their 'farms' for them, engaging to pay each man two dollars a week, an engagement these instructed Africans never fulfilled."³¹ Cases of abuse were frequently reported: "About 17 April [1841] two headmen named Freeman and Tom Jack were cruelly tortured by John Scott [a Sierra Leonean]. He charged them with having stolen a pig or pigs. ... No wonder the Kroomen at N.W. Bay threaten to shoot Scott if he comes to trouble them. ..."³²

The Sierra Leonean and Cape Coast clerks and merchants, as well as white overseers, felt little sympathy with the laborers. It is no

30. Baptist Missionary Society (London), A/11, Baptist Church Book, May 13, 1848.

31. Huntley, SEVEN YEAR'S SERVICE, I, 167.

32. Baptist Missionary Society (London), John Clarke, Journal, Vol. I (1st series), 320.

doubt natural for those possessing managerial skills to assign others the more menial tasks of society. Greater leisure is usually a concomitant of higher status; the westernized African was no doubt acting out the role considered most in keeping with his status. It could also be argued that escape from forced labor prejudices the individual against labor in general. It has been noted of the black settlers in Liberia that "it was as though, being come to Africa to escape the strictures of slavery, many of the colonists did not want to engage in the manual labor with which they had been so closely associated."³³ The attitude towards labor can, no doubt, generalize to include the laborer. Importantly, racial similarity does not necessarily ease the impact of settlement: "In fact, the colour of their skins [specifically in the Liberian case] made it more important for them to stress the social distance between themselves and the local Africans. The fact that they were not obviously physically different accentuated the fear -- shared by other colonial communities -- of being submerged in what was to them a barbarous and heathen society."³⁴ On Fernando Po these factors were clearly operative: for most of its history reports of excessive abuse of labor were common. Flogging was both instrumental and symbolic. Black masters, as well as white ones, used corporal punishment to encourage the performance of tasks and to punish their non-performance. Beyond this, physical punishment was viewed as inherent in the master-servant relationship ("It did good, people could not manage servants without it.")³⁵ The ability to command labor was, like the ability to command wealth, a symbol of high status. The previous low status of the upper echelon settlers and their affinity with their workers increased the tendency to accentuate the gulf between laborer and master by the conspicuous exercise of authority.

THE RISE OF COCOA AND CONTROLLED MIGRATION

A cocoa boom occurred in the later decades of the nineteenth

33. George Brown, *THE ECONOMIC HISTORY OF LIBERIA* (Washington, 1941), 117.

34. Merran Fraenkel, *TRIBE AND CLASS IN MONROVIA* (London, 1964), 13.

35. Baptist Missionary Society (London), John Clarke, *Journal*, Vol. I (1st series), 380, quoting John Scott.

century, a development dependent on migrant labor. In 1822, the crop had been taken from Brazil to São Tome and thirty-two years later introduced to Fernando Po. A Spanish colonial official made a trip to the Portuguese island in the 1860's and succeeded in obtaining 400 cocoa pods.³⁶ Later cocoa cultivation was supposedly spread from Fernando Po by migrant workers from Liberia, Gold Coast, and Nigeria. On the island itself the introduction of cocoa produced a shift from trade to agriculture. Descendants of Liberated Africans and Sierra Leoneans who had acquired capital in palm oil trading shifted to cocoa cultivation. In the nineties a Catholic missionary complained: "The island of Fernando Po above all has been captured by the English blacks of Sierra Leone ... and thus, the major part of the island is in the hands of these English blacks, and they have herded the Bubi, the natives of the island, into the interior...the worst part of all, where the means of subsistence are hardly found and these foreign English blacks have for the most part, the better coastal soil."³⁷ By the early nineties, one plantation alone was employing 200 migrant workers (Kru, Gold Coasters and Sierra Leoneans), and by 1901 there were 993 Liberian laborers in all on the island.³⁸

The reduction of the settlement at North-West Bay had not signaled the demise of Kru labor. The island continued to be a magnet for workers from the Kru Coast. In addition, "discharged mariners, or those jumping ship, could find employment at the settlement or stay with compatriots while awaiting a passage to the Windward Coast on one of the British men of war sailing from the island to Sierra Leone."³⁹ An American vessel visited Fernando Po in 1851 carrying three Kru as passengers; while at the island the same vessel lost six seamen through desertion.⁴⁰ A palm oil and ivory traders from Liverpool, Captain Midgley, reported that he had transported Kru to Fernando Po at their

36. Manuel de Teran, *SÍNTESIS GEOGRÁFICA DE FERNANDO PÓO* (Madrid, 1962), 84.

37. Cristobal Fernandez, *MISIONES Y MISIONEROS EN LA GUINEA ESPAÑOLA* (Madrid, 1962), 109.

38. De Teran, *SÍNTESIS GEOGRÁFICA DE FERNANDO PÓO*, 85, citing José Valero, "La isla de Fernando Póo (1891)," *BOLETIN DE LA REAL SOCIEDAD GEOGRÁFICA* (1892), and Public Records Office (London), Foreign Office 47/36, F.O. Draft (W.F. Erskind) to John Holt and Co., June 13, 1904.

39. Brooks, *THE KRU MARINER*, 25.

40. *IBID.*, citing the Log of the ship *Winnegance*, 1851-52, Essex Institute, July 10, 1851.

own request and also taken them back to their homeland.⁴¹ In 1858, when Spain responded to an impulse to develop its nominal possession, the proposal proved unfeasible without a contingent of Kru. The Spanish resorted to the usual expedient: a steamer was sent to the Windward Coast with a schooner in tow and the latter returned with a meager compliment of forty-six men.⁴²

Richard Burton, British consul on Fernando Po in the early sixties, complained that the island would have had a prosperous plantation economy "but for the curse of free labor." Kru labor was costly and the consul had a low opinion of its efficiency:

My "niggers" are, as Krumen should be, employed all the day long in clearing, cutting, and planting--it is quite the counterpart of a landowner's existence in the Southern States. Nothing will prevent them calling themselves my "children," that is to say, my slaves, and indeed no white man who has lived long in the outer tropics can prevent feeling that he is "pro tempore" the lord, master, and the proprietor of the black humanity placed under him. It is true these fellows have no overseer, consequently there is no whip; punishment resolves itself into retrenching rum and tobacco; moreover, they come and go as they please. But if a little "moral influence" were not applied to their lives, they would be dozing or quarreling all day in their quarters, and twanging a native guitar half the night, much to their own discomfort and more to their owners. Consequently I keep them to their work.⁴³

The British consul, an early scientific racist, felt that "at Fernando Po, the hire of a Kruman, who does about one-fifth of an Englishman's work, amounts all things included, to thirty shillings a week..."⁴⁴ Nevertheless, dependence on Kru labor continued and expanded as the century wore on. It's efficiency was probably not so low as Burton set it (he was influenced by the supposed inefficiency of black labor in the southern United States). The introduction of monoculture on Fernando Po created a labor famine in which any labor, slave or free

41. IBID., citing the testimony of Captain Henry Seward and Captain Thomas Midgely, PARLIAMENTARY PAPERS, 1842, 113-114 & 237-238.

42. Abelardo de Unzueta, GEOGRAFIA HISTORICA DE LA ISLA DE FERNANDO POO (Madrid, 1947), 159.

43. Richard Burton, A VISIT TO GELELE, KING OF DAHOME (London, 1864), 15.

44. IBID.

would have been welcome. At the opening of the twentieth century it could still be said: "Up to the present the labourers have been Krooboyes... Physically considered, these negroes are extremely strong and robust, and capable of working as none others could, and fond of the salt waters; they are, besides fairly intelligent and obedient to their masters."⁴⁵

After 1880, Fernando Po, with a burgeoning demand for praedial labor, was more dependent than ever on migrants. Paradoxically, as the demand for Kru increased, workers retained less and less voice in the terms and conditions of employment. The last quarter of the century saw the encroachment of Americo-Liberian authority in Liberia and the diminution of Kru freedom of action in labor migration and other matters. In 1880 President Hilary Johnson of Liberia noted: "We have an extent of sea coast of about six hundred miles teeming with hundreds of thousands of aborigines who might by their commercial operations pay hundreds of thousands of dollars into the Public Treasury."⁴⁶ By the end of the century labor migration had become an important source of revenue for Americo-Liberian officialdom. The Kru became increasingly subject to Port of Entry laws, recruitment regulations, and imposts on overseas earnings. An 1865 Port of Entry law limited labor export and trade to six Americo-Liberian settlements: Robertsport (Cape Mount), Monrovia, Marshall, Buchanan, Greenville, and Harper (Cape Palmas).⁴⁷ The issue of ports and customs was a burning one. For instance, during the administration of President David Coleman (1896-1900), the peoples of the Kru Coast were requested to pay customs on exports and imports. A Liberian gun boat was sent to emphasize the demand and the Kru consented to begin payment after the passage of three months. When, even before the expiration of that period, Kru canoes at Settra Kru went out to trade with a British vessel, they were fired upon. Attempts to harness the economic potential of the Kru Coast were the source of repeated clashes with indigenous groups and the ultimate origin of severe scandals in the late 1920's.

45. Gutterrez-Sobral, "The Outlook at Fernando-Po," WEST AFRICA (March 2, 1901), 334.

46. "The Johnson Resolution," OBSERVER (January 22, 1880), cited in Stephen Hlophe, "The Significance of Barth and Geerts' Model of Ethnicity in the Analysis of Nationalism in Liberia," CANADIAN JOURNAL OF AFRICAN STUDIES, VII, 2 (1973), 251.

47. Ronald Davis, "Historical Outline of the Kru Coast, Liberia, 1500 to the Present" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1968), 42.

In 1875 war broke out between the Monrovia government and the Cape Palmas and Cavalla River peoples. The confrontation produced an abortive attempt at unity among the Grebo; groups from Grand Cess to the San Pedro River (in the Ivory Coast) formed themselves into the Gedebo Re-united Kingdom. United States military support enabled the Liberian government to put down the "revolt," but the restitution of peace did not bring a significant lessening of conflict. The Americo-Liberian attempt to interdict and regulate trade to certain coastal ports, along with the land hunger of settlers, remained an irritant. In 1893 the Americo-Liberians, this time with the aid of the Cape Palmas Grebo, declared war on the Cavalla groups on the pretext that customs laws were being violated.

The change in Kru migration to Fernando Po in the late nineteenth century does not so much involve the breakdown of older patterns and the rise of coercion per se as it does the rise of external authority on the Kru Coast itself.

Although early nineteenth century Kru migration is usually depicted as voluntary, there is evidence that the shipment of workers involved coercion. This is in spite of the hypothesis that "the most likely explanation for this achievement [Kru labor migration] is that many young men, perhaps numbering in the hundreds, were recruited by Fishmen--Kru headmen who profited from their kinship affiliations with Bushmen--Kru lineages on the relatively highly populated Kru Coast."⁴⁸ Fernando Po provides some evidence that early in the nineteenth century duress played some part in recruitment. In 1843 a Baptist missionary described labor procurement for Fernando Po:

I was a passenger in a vessel which carried 90 wood cutters as emigrants to Fernando Po, and I saw the manner in which these men were obtained. There were 86 in all brought on board the vessel; and though it was not by force yet there was something very like it. They had no voice in the matter; they came upon the deck in a state of nudity, very few having as much as a piece of cloth about their middle. The man who brought them received for each person, certain pieces of cloth or other articles, according to his choice. Two of them had been disposed of as slaves; not for life, but for the time being, and they were sent down to Fernando Po, with the understanding that after remaining there three years, they would be able to

48. Brooks, *THE KRU MARINER*, 110.

return. Before proceeding further, I should mention that six of these men, to manifest their unwillingness to leave their own country, jumped overboard, got into their canoes by night, and made their escape. This caused vigilance in the captain, who was a humane, excellent man, and treated these people kindly. He found it necessary to send some of them below, because of their great desire to return back to their native country. ... They slept under canvas by night; they were supplied with rice and other provisions, and landed at Fernando Po.⁴⁹

It has been maintained that the traditional system of recruiting through headmen (local men who had previously been employed by Europeans and who selected new recruits) broke down in the late nineteenth century: "The promiscuous recruitment of mobs of young men by steamers systematically scouring coastal towns for laborers in the 1870's and 1880's must have shattered prevailing recruitment patterns and made it impossible for headmen to retain their former prerogative of leadership and control over wage distribution."⁵⁰ However, changes in the headmen system appear to have been gradual; the use of African recruiters continued into the twentieth century.

Laissez faire recruitment was curtailed in the nineties when the Liberian government gave recruiting rights to a German, August Humplmayr. After the expiration of the Humplmayr concession, a Liberian act of January 16, 1897 demanded contractors of labor post a \$150 bond for the laborer's return and imposed a fine of \$100 for each laborer who might die while away from Liberia.⁵¹ It was common for the labor concessionaires to send for the headman of a village and inform him that they required a number of laborers; they would have already received an indent from some firm for this number of workers and after a time the headman would appear with the desired laborers. Prior to this plantations on the island would themselves send African recruiters into the Liberian interior, give them money, promise them a large bonus for every laborer

49. J.T. Johnson, PROCEEDINGS OF THE GENERAL ANTI-SLAVERY CONVENTION CALLED BY THE COMMITTEE OF THE BRITISH AND FOREIGN ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY AND HELD IN LONDON (London, 1840), 260.

50. Brooks, THE KRU MARINER, 111.

51. Public Records Office (London), Foreign Office 47/36, Thomas H. Barker, Secretary of the African Trade Section, Liverpool Chamber of Commerce to the Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, September 7, 1903.

brought back and give them a passage order to be presented to the captain of any outbound steamer. The African recruiter would proceed inland and arrange with the local leaders for a labor contingent, bring them to Monrovia, and, when a steamer arrived, smuggle them aboard just before departure (thus circumventing paying head money to the Liberian government).

At the beginning of this century Fernando Po itself underwent an important change which did not augur well for the Kru laborer. The island's partial dependence on Kru became almost total after British authorities (anxious to preserve their own labor pools) embargoed labor from British West Africa in 1900. A Spanish colonial official lamented "twenty-years ago the number of colonies in the Gulf of Guinea was very few and much less the number of plantations; today, however, all this is changed. and there scarcely exists a mile of beach where the flag of some European nation does not fly, and where the black labourer is not a necessity."⁵² The embargo had an important effect on the relationship between the insular Spanish possession and Liberia. The anemic state of the island's agriculture was, in part, caused by the closing off of the nearby continental labor pools. Also, the Bubi population was experiencing rapid decline due to venereal disease and social dislocation. A fluctuating cocoa market, combined with labor famine, created deteriorating working conditions. The demand for labor did not result in the amelioration of the position of the laborers (although it did eventually promote the promulgation of new labor regulations and standards of payment). The pennurious Fernandino planters, competing with other users of Kru labor, could provide few economic inducements to migration. Their economic plight led them to the detention and overwork of the labor force (e.g., the embargo on labor from British West Africa was the result of a serious workers protest in 1900). Voluntary labor migration became increasingly difficult to maintain; given a free play of forces, plantation agriculture on the island would have probably collapsed. However, the spread of Americo-Liberian control within Liberia made possible the continuation of the traffic--often under duress and "civilized" direction. This coerced export of labor became an important source of public and private revenue; the elites of the black republic and the cocoa island formed a symbiosis in which both stood to gain at the expense of the migrant.

52. Gutierrez-Sobral, "The Outlook at Fernando Po," 335.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FERNANDO PO

Kru labor migration to Fernando Po continued until 1929, when the abuses involved in its recruitment by Americo-Liberian officials resulted in a League of Nations investigation. The century-long history of Kru employment on Fernando Po has since been largely ignored. Such lack of awareness deletes perhaps the most significant area of Kru impact in the nineteenth century. It has also led to unfortunate conclusions like M. Fraenkel's that "it was not until the 1930's that Kru in any numbers started settling abroad."⁵³ The Kru settlement of several hundred men at North-West Bay in the 1840's already represents a significant overseas community. While sexually asymmetrical, it was, no doubt, a settlement of respectable size by the standards of Kru Coast. Far from concluding that significant overseas residence of Kru waited until the present century, it can be argued that the semi-permanent residence of laborers on Fernando Po threatened to establish a Kru thalassocracy. The Clarence settlement was dependent on Windward Coast migrants and, although violence eventually erupted, repeatedly attempted to come to terms with the autonomous and recalcitrant community which emerged beyond its borders. The Kru impact on Fernando Po perhaps outweighed their impact elsewhere simply because Europeans and westernized Africans had no alternative source of labor. Indigenous labor proved inadequate and labor from the coastal mainland proved sporadic. The island's dependence on Kru labor was only increased in the early twentieth century when labor migration from British West Africa was embargoed.

Kru employment on Fernando Po emerges as one of the more important aspects of Kru employment in the nineteenth century. Hopefully, this outpost of Kru initiative will, in the future, play an important part in any analysis of migration from coastal Liberia.

53. Merran Fraenkel, "Social Change on the Kru Coast of Liberia," *AFRICA*, XXVI (1966), 161.

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LIBERIAN CONTRACT LABOR IN PANAMA, 1837-1897

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An isthmian canal, constantly projected as world shipping grew in the nineteenth century, actually was begun by 1880. A French company, capitalizing on the reputation and charm of Ferdinand de Lesseps, undertook the ambitious project. Financial support came from many small investors, stirred by national pride and hope for profit equal to that earned from Suez. The virtual collapse of the project by 1890 was for the French people a great disaster. Investigation of the management in Paris of the Panama debacle yielded sordid details which drew the label scandal.¹

One thousand Liberians were among the victims of the failed project. Many of these lost not their savings, as the French public, but their lives. An investigation of this aspect of the canal project also suggests scandal. The government in Monrovia did not exert itself to safeguard the victimized tribes. Critics of both the Canal Company and the labor contractors charged that African labor shipped across the Atlantic led to a revival of the slave trade.²

A shortage of labor was one important problem in Panama, among many. Twenty years later, even with more modern equipment, the United States government found that the sparsely-settled region could not

1. A recent account emphasizing French matters but omitting Panamanian is Maron J. Simon, *THE PANAMA AFFAIR* (New York, 1971).

2. Condemnation of the Canal Company for the importation of African labor was made in a pamphlet published in Paris in May 1887 and sent to Washington by the Consul General in Panama, see Despatches from United States Consuls in Panama, 1823-1906, National Archives Microfilm M-319, No. 314, May 28, 1887; criticism of labor contracting reached a peak in 1897, see Christopher Fyfe, *A HISTORY OF SIERRA LEONE* (London, 1962), 547.

supply the workers needed. Jamaica was the leading source for imported laborers. But not enough were available, even though so many Jamaicans went to Panama that there was a shortage of labor on that island. A shipment of over five hundred Chinese soon found better employment on the isthmus. Thus were imported the first laborers from Africa, arriving on April 1, 1887.³

The Liberians (as all Africans were generally labelled) were principally of the Kru tribes, from the lands along the coast to the east of the main settlements of Americo-Liberians. Also included were numbers of Vai ("Veys"), recruited from the region west of Monrovia into Sierra Leone.⁴ The Kru had traditionally taken employment with Europeans. So noted were they as sailors, that the British actively resisted efforts by others to extend influence over a region that provided so many of their seamen, both commercial and naval. Serving ably, the Kru received good treatment, lest the supply of future recruits be threatened. Term of service was generally no more than one year.⁵

The recruitment of the Kru as well as their transportation to Panama in 1887 was handled by Woermann of Hamburg. This German commercial house had traded in Liberia since 1850. Its steamship line provided speed and comfort beyond that which British service had given. A monthly express boat went from Hamburg to Southampton to Monrovia.⁶ The Woermann line possessed both the connections in Liberia and the vessels needed to ship laborers to Panama on contract to the French Canal Company.

At first the opportunity in Panama seemed attractive to the Kru. Among the 291 laborers landed April 1 at Colon, on the Caribbean coast of the isthmus, were nine Liberians responsible for an assessment. These returned to their various tribes with a favorable report. The nine leaders returned with a much larger contingent of 715 additional workers (thus a total of 1006) who arrived on September 21, 1887.⁷

3. Despatches, Panama, No. 335, October 20, 1887; Simon, THE PANAMA AFFAIR, 53.

4. Despatches from United States Ministers to Liberia, 1863-1906, National Archives Microfilm, M-170, No. 19, August 31, 1887.

5. Sir Harry Johnston, LIBERIA (New York, 1906), 2 vols., I, 294-8.

6. IBID., 290-4.

7. Despatches, Panama, No. 335, October 20, 1887. The names of the leaders (eight men and a boy, according to one source) are unknown.

This second group found the survivors of the first boatload to be very restive.

As noted by the Colon correspondent of the PANAMA STAR AND HERALD (published across the isthmus at Panama City), there was the possibility of trouble. The initial group had soon found conditions to be worse than at first supposed. With the rainy season in May came disease and death. Soon the Liberians appealed to the United States Consul in Panama City that they be sent home. But nothing could be done immediately. In the next few months, the Liberians compiled a good work record, wrote the reporter, but they continued to complain. Ominous remarks were made about the fact that soon there would be many more to protest. The Africans alarmed the STAR AND HERALD's correspondent by giving the "appearance of savagery as much due to their condition of nudity (or nearly so) as ... the grand display of splendid physiques."⁸

Meanwhile, investigation of the circumstances of the Liberians' plight was undertaken in both Panama and Monrovia. The United States government through its representatives was the only agency active in seeking the welfare of the workers. Even before a delegation had made a protest march to his office, the Consul General in Panama had been instructed by Washington to look into the matter. He reported that the Liberians were uncertain as to the precise terms of their contract; they did not possess a copy. Two years at a monthly rate of two pounds and ten shillings seemed to be their agreement. Also provided was one Colombian peso (worth seventy-two cents) every two weeks for tobacco and other personal expenses. The basic wage was not to be paid until the end of the contract. While this could have meant substantial savings (meals and lodging were furnished), the problem was to live to collect. Already death was decimating the ranks. The consul offered hope of getting the contract terminated.⁹

Meanwhile in Monrovia, the U.S. Legation acted also to learn the situation. The Minister was shocked to find that the government not only was aware of the labor traffic, but had signed a contract authorizing it. The contractors were the Woermann Company and Xavier Pené, a merchant of the French colonial settlement in Libreville, Gabon. They paid two dollars to the government per worker shipped. As many

8. PANAMA STAR AND HERALD, September 22, 1887.

9. Despatches, Panama, No. 314, May 28, 1887.

as five thousand per year could be recruited. Terms of service in Panama was limited to one year (not two, as the workers had been told). A limit of fourteen months absence included the voyage time of nearly a month each way.¹⁰

The Liberian government's answer to the United States Minister's query emphasized that the migration was regulated by the Shipping Laws of the republic. Medical treatment was guaranteed on the voyage, as well as in Panama. Further stipulations were that humane treatment was to be given; no military service required; payment to be in specie; and that in the event of the death of any worker, his accrued wages should be paid to the government of Liberia, to be forwarded to his family.¹¹ The sum of sixty-seven dollars and thirteen cents was eventually transmitted from Panama to Monrovia via Washington as wages earned by deceased workers.¹² The total amount accrued by the dead should have been many times this; there may have been other payments from the Canal Company directly to the Liberian government.

Monrovia would have been able to compensate the families of the workers through agents appointed in various counties to supervise labor emigration under the Shipping Laws. As the note from the Liberian Secretary of State to the U.S. Minister stressed, these laws provided regulation and prevented abuse. However, it was "the custom from time immemorial for Kroomen or other free tribes" to accept work on various vessels which visited their coast. The government felt it had not the right to abridge this traditional enterprise. Its only indication of concern about possible problems in Panama was the assertion that the government had in mind the appointment of some U.S. citizen resident there to represent Liberia. But the welcomed activity already commenced by the Department of State in Washington had forestalled this. Clearly implied was the desire for U.S. consuls to continue to save Monrovia the expense of overseas diplomacy.¹³

The minister in Liberia was exasperated by the government's casual attitude toward the emigrants of tribes over which it claimed to rule. In Panama, concern grew as the death toll mounted. By October, the

10. Despatches, Liberia, No. 14, June 14, 1887.

11. IBID., Liberia's only supervision in Panama was apparently that of the contractors themselves, see Despatches, Panama, No. 335, October 20, 1887.

12. IBID., September 6, 1887.

13. IBID., No. 14, June 14, 1887.

consulate calculated the annual rate of fatalities at thirty-eight percent. No deaths were reported in the first two and one-half months after the Liberians' arrival. Thirty-six had died since, twenty-three in the mere three weeks ending on October 18. It was assumed that the victims were of the contingent landed in April. The more numerous force arrived in September, and would soon also begin to succumb.¹⁴

Indeed the mortality rate remained high. Fifty-four deaths were reported by the Inter-oceanic Canal Company for the period 18 October - 31 December 1887. The victims, listed by name with only a few "Kroömen" identified more especially, included primarily those who had been admitted to the hospital at Panama City. Total deaths in 1887 were far greater than ninety. A year-end letter from the Liberians to the consul stated that 389 men had died.¹⁵

Beriberi was the most common listed cause of death.¹⁶ While the disease was familiar, its dietary cause was not determined until the following decades.¹⁷ Hence it would seem that the unbalanced diet of the labor crews - and not Panama's notorious "malarial" climate, from which the Africans may have been supposed to have been immune - was the prime killer. Complaints about food, ordinary to such a situation of alien labor feed en masse, are not to be found in the Liberians' own urgent pleas to be repatriated. The rampant mortality no doubt caused them to overlook what would have seemed a relatively innocuous complaint. And the Canal Company can not be blamed for its failure to be twenty years in advance of medical research.

Fever, the traditional scourge of the isthmus, was listed as the cause of death for only a few victims. Pulmonary congestion, bronchitis and pneumonia together accounted for more. Accidents killed several workers. And of course many died without reaching the hospital, primarily from disease, as the fears expressed by Liberians made

14. Despatches, Panama, No. 335, October 20, 1887.

15. IBID., No. 361, January 14, 1888.

16. IBID., twenty-nine of the fifty-four hospital deaths of 18 October - 31 December 1887 were specifically listed as due to beriberi.

17. "Beriberi," THE ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA, Vol. 3 (1964), 506-7, the decisive experiments contrasting diets of brown rice with polished rice (lacking thiamine) were made in 1897 and in 1907-11.

clear.¹⁸ At least one died and several were injured in mid-November, during an outbreak of violence between the various groups of workers.

"Rioting Along the Line; Race Hatreds Cause Trouble" cried the headlines of the PANAMA STAR AND HERALD. Its story was balanced and apparently accurate. The restrained style of mid-nineteenth century journalism had not given way to the sensationalism of later times. Furthermore, the delay imposed by weekly or biweekly publication (there existed regular and steamer editions, in English and Spanish) gave time for developments of several days to be put in perspective. The facts reported were as follows:¹⁹

1. On Sunday, 13 November 1887, a Liberian riding in the second class car on the morning train, apparently drunk, began a fight which escalated to a general disorder.

2. At Bas Obispo, one of two principal camps of the Liberians, about thirty or forty workers were waiting on the platform ready for a brawl.

3. The Africans were anxious to battle other groups, notably the "Carthaginians" (evidently imported Colombians, from Cartagena and elsewhere on the north coast) and the Jamaicans.

4. After attacks on these groups were frustrated by the weaponry of the defenders, the Liberians fled to the forests. Here they discarded their work clothes; scantily attired, they were in their customary state for war.

5. "The government has acted with commendable promptitude, and the active steps taken have, without doubt, prevented this extraordinary movement assuming greater proportions." One African was killed and four wounded in a skirmish with troops sent from Panama City.

6. By Wednesday, November 16, 1887, all was quiet and the African laborers were at work. A "chief of these crude sons of Africa" known as Tom, the Best Man helped bring calm. Arrested as originators of the disorders were one Liberian and an engineer. Their motives were not reported, nor were the causes (other than ethnic rivalries) of labor

18. Despatches, Panama, No. 361, January 14, 1888; the Liberians stated that 200 were ill in addition to the 389 counted dead. The Kru suffered considerable mortality on other occasions outside West Africa, see George E. Brooks, THE KRU MARINER IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY, AN HISTORICAL COMPENDIUM (Newark, Del., 1972), 23, fn. 68.

19. PANAMA STAR AND HERALD, November 19, 1887, enclosed with Despatches, Panama, No. 344, November 21, 1887.

unrest. The STAR AND HERALD did not engage in investigative journalism nor did it publicize labor exploitation, as is done by the press of a later time.

While the eventual press reports were restrained, the initial rumors in Panama City had African laborers "murdering, ravishing and frightfully mutilating the natives, etc. etc." The U.S. Consul was urged by the prefect of the city to go to the scene in order to calm the insurgents. This he was reluctant to do as "my presence ... might seem to involve my government and commit it to certain undesirable responsibilities." The British Consul did go; it was conveniently supposed that many of the so-called Liberians were from "Senegambia and from the coasts of the gulf of Guinea."²⁰

The Colombian governor of the Department of Panama notified the U.S. Consul that troops were being sent to repress the disorder. In response, the latter acknowledged that in the absence of Liberian representation he was authorized to exercise his good offices for the protection of the laborers. While declining to leave Panama City without some specific role to play as mediator, the consul urged that excessive force not be used. The language of the official notice indicated strong anti-African feeling.²¹ This attitude remained three months later.²²

The innumerable complaints, presented by the inhabitants of the towns along the line of the Railroad and Canal route... with regard to the fears they entertain that the African laborers, which the Company has imported for its works, may make, as they have threatened, a brutal attack upon them, which in view of the semi-savage character of these individuals of the human race might have sad consequences, and His Excellency the Governor of the Department being aware that the majority of these men are armed, he has therefore decided ... to disarm these workmen...

In forwarding a copy of this notice to Washington, the consul expressed again his hope that the Liberian government would prevent further migration of workers to Panama. In addition to the attitude of the

20. Despatches, Panama, No. 344, November 21, 1887.

21. IBID., the government stated that the workers "might well be called savages /and/obey only their passions..."

22. IBID., No. 364, February 13, 1888.

authorities, the likely financial collapse of the Canal Company was seen as about to increase the suffering and to sharpen cultural animosities.

Several weeks earlier, on December 20, 1887, a quaint but pathetic letter signed "The Liberians" had been sent to "Our dear American Council" /sic./ In awkward yet direct English, it stated: We dont want to stay in this country no more longer. The sickness of this country is not agree with us..." A total of 389 men had died, stated the writer, and two hundred were ill. None of the original thousand expected to survive the full year of their contract. Brief mention was made of the "war" against other groups" "They have already kill two and some are wounded, the Liberians have no guns." But the primary plea was for prompt return to Liberia: "Our greement with Mr. Payne was if this country was not good for us he will take us back..."²³

"Mr. Payne" may have been the Liberian hired in Monrovia as U.S. Vice-consul General.²⁴ The name was prominent among the settlers, including a former president of the republic. Beverly Y. Payne, appointed in September 1887 (after the laborers had departed), forwarded to the Liberian government the list of workers who had died in Panama. Its response was to affirm the doubts expressed on the isthmus as to whether the workers were in fact Liberian. It was stated that the violence charged to the Africans would be impossible, given the tranquil customs of the Liberian tribes.²⁵

Without making an issue of this blatant evasion, Payne informed Washington that he had "reason to believe" that the Liberian government would prevent further emigration.²⁶ Soon after he was notified of this formally.²⁷ The matter had already been the subject of political discussion in Monrovia. The President, in his official message

23. IBID., No. 361, January 14, 1888.

24. Payne served for several years at an annual salary of \$300; he replaced Minister Charles H.J. Taylor, who had departed soon after his arrival on 30 May 1887, Despatches, Liberia, No. 23, September 22, 1887.

25. Despatches, Liberia, No. 4, March 17, 1888.

26. IBID.

27. IBID., No. 6, March 27, 1888.

to the Legislature, had defended the activity:²⁸

Considerable speculation having been indulged in, in reference to the emigration of laborers to Panama, I consider it necessary to observe, that the Legislature of the Republic, recognizing the right of citizens to sell their labor in the best markets, enacted the shipping laws, with a view to protecting, or setting safeguards around, a right always possessed and always recognized.

The present government of the Republic has positively refused to allow citizens to be transported, to engage in foreign wars, although it has been alleged, by parties seeking Liberian aid in this direction, that previous governments of the Republic granted such permission - a permission, you will agree with me, altogether at variance with international law, and conflicting with the interests of the country and the dictates of humanity.

But in this case of employment of labor for peaceful purposes, the Government saw no paramount interest of the State warring against it. Its duty, then, was clear -- to see that safeguards set for the protection of the life, liberty and property of the employed were duly observed.

Up to the present, it appears that the agents have acted in conformity with the engagements entered into with the Government, observing the Liberian laws and respecting the integrity of the Liberian territory.

Another presidential message three years later criticized unauthorized French recruitment, both for Panama and for military purposes.²⁹

28. MESSAGE OF THE PRESIDENT OF LIBERIA COMMUNICATED TO THE FIRST SESSION OF THE TWENTY FIRST LEGISLATURE (Monrovia, 1887), 4, enclosed with Despatches, Monrovia, December 23, 1887.

29. MESSAGE OF THE PRESIDENT, 1890, 10, cited in Raymond Leslie Buell, THE NATIVE PROBLEM IN AFRICA (London, 1965), II, 777, fn. 11.

Remarkably, a sequel occurred in 1897. The Canal Company, after suspending operations in 1888, had resumed excavation on a minor scale. A labor contractor operating in Sierra Leone was able to recruit a number of Krumen for Panama by paying one pound per worker to their chiefs. Seventy or eighty Liberians among five hundred Africans crossed the Atlantic. The U.S. government, still protective of Liberians, protested to London against a "revival of the slave trade".³⁰ Again the project was disastrous: "At Panama the laborers fell ill from beriberi; some died; they mutinied and were repatriated."³¹

Consistent in the sorry record of Liberian labor in Panama were several things. Monrovia seemed barely concerned by the plight of the Kru. Washington did react, and its representatives served as the principal support of the workers. Misunderstood problems of health and clashes with other groups made the situation untenable for the African canal workers. Fortunate were the repatriated survivors.

30. Despatches, Panama, No. 100, September 2, 1897.

31. Fyfe, A HISTORY OF SIERRA LEONE, 547.

BLACK AMERICAN IMAGES OF LIBERIA,

1877 - 1914

Lenwood G. Davis

In recent years there has been a great deal of academic interest in Africa and especially in certain countries - Ghana, Nigeria, Guinea, Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda. Liberia, on the other hand, has received very little attention. The assumption is that, like North Africa and the Union of South Africa, Liberia presents a special case with a different history and development from the other African countries. There is some validity to this assumption: Liberia, unlike other African countries, except Ethiopia, was never under physical occupancy by a European power; its economic development was stagnant because it did not receive large capital investments from a European country; its relationships with the United States set it apart from other countries in Africa; and it was settled partly by ex-slaves from the United States.

Yet from another point of view, it makes little sense to argue that Liberia is somehow "un-African" because it is governed by a group whose background sets it apart from the new leaders of other areas of the continent. Indeed, it may be argued that Liberia deserves careful study because of its historical relationships with the United States and especially with Black Americans. Moreover, because of the current emphasis on closer relationships between Black Americans and Black Africans and the new emphasis on Pan-Africanism, Liberia and its relationship with Black Americans needs to be reassessed.

Blacks in the United States in the past have identified more with Liberia than any other African country. It was only in the early twentieth century that many Blacks viewed Africa as anything other than Liberia. Harry Dean, in his autobiographical narrative, aptly expressed the image held by many Blacks when he declared, "Liberia was the one

country that I heard most about during my childhood."¹ Blacks even expressed the image they had of Liberia in folklore and music. According to Miles Mark Fisher, "Liberia, called 'home,' 'Canaan,' and 'heab'n' by Blacks in 1824, and was also still so referred to during [Nat] Turner's aftermath, but now it was also called 'the promised land,' 'Zion,' 'Paradise,' and the 'new Jerusalem.'"² Further evidence of this image of Liberia is seen in the voluminous amount of letters received by the American Colonization Society.³

Four basic themes concerning Liberia can be delineated in the writings of Blacks between 1877-1914: emigration, christianization, education, and ethnic identification. Most poor Blacks wanted to emigrate to Africa and Liberia in search of a better life than what they had here in the United States. They thought any place would be better for them than America. Many of the educated Blacks as well as the Black religious leaders were of the belief that the best way to help Africans was through missionary work. They thought that Africans could be uplifted by giving them the high ideals of "American Christianity." Coupled with christianity was the belief that if Africans were given the "proper" education they would be able to help themselves and accept Western civilization's way of life. Many Blacks did see some cultural relationship with Africa because they fully realized that even though they were living in America they were not fully accepted as Americans. Therefore they looked to Africa as a place with which they had some cultural ties.

During and immediately after the Civil War there was little interest on the part of many Blacks in Liberia or Africa. Emancipation seemed to promise a better life in America, a promise that violence of Reconstruction weakened but did not destroy. After the Compromise of 1877, which resolved the disputed presidential election of 1876, Blacks increasingly feared they were being abandoned by the federal government

1. Harry Dean, *THE PEDRO GORINA: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVE* (Boston, 1929), 56. See also St. Clair Drake, "Negro Americans and the African Interest," in John P. Davis, ed., *THE AMERICAN NEGRO REFERENCE BOOK* (Englewood Cliffs, 1966), 662-685.

2. Miles Mark Fisher, *NEGRO SLAVE SONGS IN THE UNITED STATES* (Ithaca, 1953), 111-112.

3. *ANNUAL REPORTS OF THE AMERICAN COLONIZATION SOCIETY WITH THE MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS: AFRICAN REPOSITORY*, (1881-1892); *LIBERIA BULLETIN*, (1892-1909); See also Carter G. Woodson, *THE MIND OF THE NEGRO AS REFLECTED IN LETTERS WRITTEN DURING THE CRISIS 1800-1860*. Reprinted (New York, 1969).

at the very time southern whites were trying to control them both politically and economically. The removal of Federal troops from the South by 1877 and the 1883 Supreme Court decision against the Civil Rights Act, caused a demoralization among Blacks that would last into the twentieth century.⁴ One group of emigrants, however, did go to Liberia a year after the Compromise of 1877. On February 15, 1878, the United States Minister and Consul General, J. Milton Turner, reported that the American bark Liberia had just arrived at Monrovia, with fifty-three immigrants, mostly from North Carolina and Mississippi.⁵ Also among the passengers were two "commissioners of emigration," seeking homes for Blacks from Arkansas. In Bishop Henry McNeal Turner's view the civil rights decision of 1883 marked a new high in White nationalism in the United States and it was obvious that there was no room for Black people in a White man's country. He told Blacks "if the Court's decision is right and is accepted by the country then prepare to return to Africa or get ready for extermination."⁶ Emigration sentiment greatly increased, and a number of Blacks actually went to Africa, but "The number of emigrants," stated August Meier, "is not an index to the sentiment for colonization, as most of those who expressed a desire to go were never able to do so."⁷

During the 1880's the American Colonization Society (ACS) which had aided 23,000 Blacks to settle in Liberia before the Civil War, received many letters indicating that economics was the predominate reason Blacks wanted to go to Liberia.⁸ There were, however, indications

4. Cited in Edwin S. Redkey, *BLACK EXODUS: BLACK NATIONALISTS AND BACK-TO-AFRICA MOVEMENTS, 1890-1910* (New Haven, 1969), 22. See also H.M. Turner, *THE BARBAROUS DECISION OF THE SUPREME COURT DECLARING THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACT UNCONSTITUTIONAL* (Atlanta, 1883).

5. *DEPARTMENT OF STATE PAPERS RELATING TO THE FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1878-1879*, 522-525.

6. Redkey, *BLACK EXODUS*, 42.

7. August Meier, *NEGRO THOUGHT IN AMERICA 1880-1915* (Ann Arbor, 1969), 64.

8. American Colonization Society, *ANNUAL REPORTS*; Carey Mathew, *LETTERS ON THE COLONIZATION SOCIETY* (Philadelphia, 1832); Early Lee Fox, *THE AMERICAN COLONIZATION SOCIETY 1817-1840* (Baltimore, 1919); William Lloyd Garrison, *THOUGHTS ON AFRICAN COLONIZATION* (Boston, 1832); J. Staudenraus, *THE AFRICAN COLONIZATION MOVEMENT, 1816-1865* (New York, 1961); William Jay, *AN INQUIRY INTO THE CHARACTER AND TENDENCY OF THE AMERICAN COLONIZATION SOCIETY AND AMERICAN ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETIES* (New York, 1835).

of political, social and nationalistic reasons as well. Writing in the 1880's Reverend Henry McNeal Turner declared, "There never was a time when the colored people were more concerned about Africa in every aspect than at the present time. In all portions of the country it is the topic of conversation."⁹ In the 1890's Turner became the leading advocate of emigration. In 1893 he called a national meeting in Cincinnati to organize a massive drive to send Blacks to Africa and especially Liberia. A year earlier he had visited Liberia and sent back glowing reports. He said, "one thing the Black man has here in Liberia and that is manhood, freedom, and the fullest liberty; he feels like a lord and walks the same way."¹⁰ Turner's accounts of what he saw in Liberia were designed to encourage Blacks to repatriate themselves and take advantage of the opportunities Liberia offered in commerce and agriculture, but most of all in equality and self-respect. He believed that Blacks could not find justice in the United States and that they should migrate to Liberia and other parts of Africa.

In November of 1893, Turner held the convention. Because of financial reasons he had to invite not only those interested in emigration but well-to-do Blacks as well, even though they were the ones least likely to emigrate. Many of the delegates at the convention were penniless Blacks from the South. Most middle-class and educated Blacks rejected Bishop Turner's plans for a massive back-to-Africa campaign. Frederick Douglass, the leading Black spokesman during the 1880's and 1890's, also made it clear that he did not believe in any wholesale plan of colonization to Africa. Turner, however, was convinced that millions of poor Blacks would go to Liberia and Africa if they were financially able. There is considerable evidence in the American Colonization Society files that clearly show that Blacks would migrate to Liberia if the ACS provided them with transportation. Three years later in 1896 Bishop Turner argued "I believe two or three millions of us should return to the land of our ancestors and establish our own nations, civilization, laws, customs, style of manufacture, and not only give the world, like other race varieties, the benefit of ours, and cease to be grumblers, chronic complainers, and a menace to the white man's country he claims and is bound to dominate."¹¹ Turner, unlike some Blacks that only talked about what other Blacks should do,

9. Cited in Otis H. Tiffany, *AFRICA FOR AFRICANS* (Washington, 1884), 12.

10. *A.M.E. CHURCH REVIEW*, 8 (April 1892), 446-498.

11. "The American Negro and the Fatherland," in J.W.E. Bowen, ed., *AFRICA AND THE AMERICAN NEGRO* (Atlanta, 1896), 196.

believed in positive action. Reverend Turner was mainly responsible for 321 Blacks migrating to Liberia in March 1896.

The group of 170 men and 151 women departed on the Steamship Laurada from Savannah, Georgia.¹² Many had been farmers in the South and unlike many migrants were not penniless. Some had owned land or were otherwise well-circumstanced.¹³ This would suggest that all Black Americans that migrated to Liberia were not penniless as is common thought. Moreover, this fact definitely supports W.E.B. Du Bois's contention that the Back-to-Africa Movement "commended itself not simply to the inexperienced and to demagogues, but to the prouder and more independent type of Negro" to those, that is, who could no longer endure the humiliating experience of "begging for justice and recognition" from men who had no intentions of being just or of recognizing the humanity of Black folk.¹⁴ Turner also became the Chancellor of the Colored National Emigration and Commercial Association,¹⁵ and served as an adviser to the International Migration Society of Birmingham, Alabama. This organization sent nearly 500 emigrants to Africa before it became defunct in 1900.¹⁶ There are conflicting reports about those who stayed in Africa and the few that returned to the United States. The ones that stayed fared reasonably well and some even prospered.¹⁷ On the other hand, those that returned told of poor land, no food and poor living conditions. Even though Bishop Turner and others could do little to stimulate a large scale emigration movement in the years between 1897 and 1900, a number of Blacks still considered going to Africa.¹⁸

Between 1890 and 1914 there were few large scale attempts to emigrate to Liberia or to other areas in Africa. The economic and political situation in the United States, the Spanish-American War, lack of regular steamships traveling to Liberia, shortage of financial support of the ACS and Black missionary societies and the coming of World War I were the main reasons for the lack of emigration out of the United States. There was however a significant Black exodus from

12. W.K. Roberts, AN AFRICAN CANAAN FOR THE AMERICAN NEGRO (Birmingham, 1896), 18-19.

13. IBID., 19.

14. W.E.B. Du Bois, DUSK OF DAWN: AN ESSAY TOWARD AN AUTO-BIOGRAPHY OF A RACE CONCEPT (New York, 1940), 195.

15. Redkey, BLACK EXODUS, 195-251.

16. IBID.

17. IBID., 241.

18. IBID., 261.

the South to the mid-West, West, and border states. Many Black leaders supported Blacks migrating within the United States as the best solution to Black Americans difficulties.

There was some relationship between internal and external migration movements. Most emigrants in the United States went to Oklahoma and Arkansas, Racial tension in those states were even more severe than in some Southern states. Many whites who lived in Oklahoma and Arkansas had migrated from Southern states and brought their deep seated prejudices with them. Furthermore, the whites were competing with Blacks for the same jobs and land or lived on adjacent farms. Moreover, those two states, like other Southern states, passed Jim Crow segregation laws. Blacks in those states had come seeking independence and fair deal in life, but when those goals seemed unattainable some concluded that perhaps they could find freedom and justice only in a Black country. There were people in the state of Arkansas who praised Liberia as the place to go. Emigrants who had left the area for Liberia in recent years wrote back in praise of Africa.¹⁹ This interest in returning to the "fatherland," however, was mainly kept alive by Bishop Turner, who until his death in 1915, continued to encourage Black Americans to leave a racist country and help build strong Black nations in Liberia and other parts of Africa. Despite Turner's interest in migration it did not gain national attention until the emergence of Marcus Garvey in the early 1920's.

Blacks identified with Liberia in ways other than emigration. Blacks in the 1880's and 1890's saw as their special obligation the christianization of Africans. Redkey sees these missionary movements as acceptable to Blacks for several reasons.²⁰ Although Blacks

19. IBID., 210.

20. Edwin S. Redkey, "The Meaning of Africa to Afro-Americans, 1890-1914," BLACK ACADEMY REVIEW (Spring-Summer 1972), 14-15. See also Wilber Christian Harr, "The Negro as an American Missionary in Africa," Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Chicago Divinity School, 1945; Bodine T. Russell, "What are the Policies, Practices, and Attitudes of the Foreign Missions Boards in North America with Reference to the Sending of American Negroes as Foreign Missionaries?" Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Presbyterian Choege of Christian Education, 1945; Lewellen L. Berry, A CENTURY OF MISSIONS OF THE AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH (New York, 1942); Donald G. Fraser, THE NEW AFRICA (New York, 1928).

acknowledged their special link with Africa, they wanted to avoid a close identification with it, and missions were an acceptable way of reconciling this uneasy dualism.²¹ Another reason was that the Black congregation believed that Africa needed conversion and uplifting.²² According to Redkey, many Black churchmen sent missionaries, or at least talked about it, not so much of concern for the Africans themselves but they felt that by "elevating the natives" they could stop the unfavorable comparisons which provided fuel for white racists. Lastly, Professor Redkey argues that when urged by Bishop Turner to emigrate, many, especially the middle class Blacks sent missionaries instead.²³ Turner had declared at one point "God brought the Negro to America and christianized him so that he might go back to Africa and redeem that land."²⁴

Several conferences, meetings, congresses and symposiums were held between 1883 and 1895 to discuss the missionary activities of Black Americans to Liberia and Africa. Most of the meetings were sponsored by white church organizations. They believed that Black churchmen should do the same thing for Africans that whites were doing for Chinese. The A.M.E. Church, however, did sponsor a symposium in 1884. This was the first major meeting of this nature by that church dealing specifically with Black Americans' attitudes toward Africa. The topic of the symposium was "What Should Be The Policy of the Colored American Toward Africa?" The churchmen saw the policies of Black Americans to Africa and particularly to Liberia to be the christianization of Africans by Black missionaries, the acknowledgement of Africa as the "fatherland," and finally the civilizing of the continent.²⁵

The first conference to focus on the obligations as seen by whites of Black churchmen to Africa was held in the summer of 1893 at the Chicago World Fair. Here American Blacks saw many African exhibits and acquired new knowledge about Liberia and other areas of Africa.

21. Redkey, "The Meaning of Africa to Afro-American, 1890-1914, 14-15.

22. IBID.

23. IBID.

24. M.M. Ponton, LIFE AND TIMES OF HENRY M. TURNER (Atlanta, 1917), 77.

25. A.M.E. CHURCH REVIEW, 2 (July 1885), 68-75.

The attraction for Liberia was its exhibit of fauna and handicrafts. Many Blacks that attended the exhibits, including Frederick Douglass, were embarrassed by the Africans who set up a tribal village of thatched huts, wore their traditional dress and raced their canoes on the lagoon. This attitude on the part of Blacks led Bishop Turner to say, "Our jet Black American fools (who) would walk up and look a while and say, 'I wonder why they brought those Africans over here to disgrace us? They had better stay at home.' But thank God, many of our people had sense enough, heart enough, and Christ enough to say, those are my folks, we all came from the same stock." I shall now work for the cause of missions as I never have before."²⁶ Turner was clearly telling Black Americans that these Africans were our people and we should redeem them.

In August of 1893 the American Missionary Association in conjunction with the fair held the "World's Congress on Africa." Participants came from the United States, Europe and Africa. The Congress lasted a week and addresses were given by missionaries, scientists, explorers, and anthropologists, as well as statesmen. The purpose, according to Frederick P. Noble, secretary of the meeting, was to stimulate Black missionaries to go to Africa.²⁷ The delegates discussed not only the issue of missionaries in Africa, but also "Africa in America."

Many Blacks attended the meetings and participated in the discussions. At least one Liberian also attended the congress - Momolu Massaquoi.²⁸ Bishop Turner was in attendance and advocated emigration to Liberia and Africa. G. L. Imes, and T. Thomas Fortune, editor of the New York Age, disagreed with the Bishop from Georgia on emigration. The major accomplishment of the congress was that it brought together a significant number of Blacks and gave them an opportunity to get first hand knowledge about Liberia and other African countries. Redkey concluded that although the theme of mass emigration to Africa still haunted the meeting, most of the Blacks who attended endorsed missionary tokenism.²⁹

This meeting received news coverage nationwide, but a second conference held in Atlanta at Gammon Theological Seminary in December 1895, received little news coverage outside that city. Many who attended the 1893 meetings in Chicago also attended this meeting.

26. VOICE OF MISSION (October 1893).

27. Frederick P. Noble, THE CHICAGO CONGRESS ON AFRICA (Chicago, 1893), 285-86.

28. IBID.

29. Redkey, "The Meaning of Africa to Afro-Americans, 1890-1914," 17.

The meeting was called the "Congress on African and the American Negro," this was to some degree another example of white encouragement of Black missions to Africa.

The majority of the speakers were white. The primary objective of the speakers was to remind Blacks of their obligations to Liberia and Africa. The Blacks that appeared on the program informed their white sponsors that they fully realized their responsibilities to Africans. M.C.B. Mason, who spoke on "The Methodist Episcopal Church and Africa," thought that Black Americans had an obligation to Christianize Africa. Reverend E. W. S. Hammond's speech followed a similar theme when he emphasized the duty the Christian world owed to Africa. He believed "there ought to be, and there must be, an unbroken line of Christian workers stretching from the Cape of Good Hope to Egypt...to Liberia. T. Thomas Fortune, on the other hand, played down the missionary zeal of Black Americans. Instead he stressed the assimilation of Black Americans by White Americans. John H. Smyth received a warm response from Blacks in the audience when he reminded them to learn about Africa and not to forget their racial ties to Africa. Reverend Alexander Crummell who spoke on "Civilization as a Collateral and Indispensable Instrumentality in Planting the Christian Church in Africa," continued to encourage Black churchmen to Christianize Africans. Bishop Turner's topic was "The American Negro and the Fatherland," and as usual he called for massive emigration on the part of Blacks to Liberia and Africa.³⁰ Only the latter three had actually traveled to Liberia and the African continent. Two Africans were also present: Mr. Orishtuken Faduma of West Africa and Miss Etna Holderness of West Africa. Black students and professors from Atlanta Seminary, Spellman Seminary, and Clark University attended many of the sessions. The major accomplishment of the Congress was that it gave Blacks additional information about conditions in Liberia and Africa, as well as the need for Black missionary work there.

Like Bishop Turner, Reverend Charles S. Morris deeply believed that it was the destiny of Black Americans to Christianize his less fortunate African brothers. He expressed his position at the 1900 Ecumenical Missionary Conference in New York: "I believe that God is going to put it into the hearts of these Black boys and girls in the schools in the South to go with the message to South Africa and West Africa, and vindicate American slavery as far as it can be vindicated

30. Bowen, AFRICA AND THE AMERICAN NEGRO, 144-203, 208, 69-83.

by taking across the ocean the stream of life."³¹ Similar words were to be echoed at another conference fourteen years later. John W. Gilbert, President of Miles Memorial College, addressed the Negro Christian Student Conference, May 14-18, 1914. His topic, "The Southern Negro's Debt and Responsibility to Africa," emphasized the missionary awakening among Black students and their obligation to Africa.³² Reverend Gilbert saw Blacks going to African and "helping to Christianize it in every sense of that word." He was referring to Western civilization's concept of Christianity. "What are some of the obligations that we American Negroes are under to Africa, he asked?" The foremost seems to me," he continued, "to be the giving to Africa a Negro ideal of all that is best in Christianity."³³ He was alluding to the idea of brotherly love and respect for humanity in Christianity. The president of another Black college had earlier expressed the same view. Reverend J. C. Price, President of Livingstone College, submitted that "The peculiar work of the American Negro was the redemption of their race in Africa, which was their own country."³⁴ Price like other ministers in the 1880's and 1890's believed that Black Americans could best help Africans by going to Africa and Christianizing them. He went on to contend that "it was the duty of the American Negro to go to African and reclaim their country, civilize the Negro there, give them manual and intellectual education and show them the way to build up their country."³⁵

Coupled with Christianizing the Africans was that of educating them. Blacks shared many of the same images about Africans as White Americans,³⁶ especially the view that Africa was inhabited by savages and barbarians. This image, as Drake points out, did have a negative affect upon Black Americans attitudes toward Africa, but it also spurred some Blacks to try to change the image to what they conceived as the

31. ECUMENICAL MISSIONARY CONFERENCE, NEW YORK, APRIL 2 - MAY 1, 1900 (New York, 1900), I, 469-71.

32. A M. Trawick, ed., THE NEW VOICE IN RACE ADJUSTMENT, ADDRESSES AND REPORTS PRESENTED AT THE NEGRO CHRISTIAN STUDENT CONFERENCE, MAY 14-18, 1914, 129-133.

33. IBID.

34. SEVENTIETH ANNUAL REPORT OF THE AMERICAN COLONIZATION SOCIETY WITH THE MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS, JANUARY, 16, 18, 19, 1887, 23.

35. IBID., 23.

36. Drake, "Negro Americans and the African Interest." See also Harold Isaac, "The American Negro and Africa: Some Notes," PHYLON, (Fall 1959), 212-233.

African reality.³⁷

Many Blacks thought that Africans could be "uplifted" through education. Attorney Thomas McCants Stewart, who had taught at Liberia College, encouraged Blacks "to build up a new ... Negro Nationality in the 'Fatherland,' that would cause Blacks to be respected everywhere."³⁸ Richard T. Greener, Professor of Metaphysics and Logic at the University of South Carolina, held a similar view. He believed that Black Americans would go to Liberia and then to other parts of the continent and become "more and more interested in the capabilities of his Fatherland."³⁹ Professor Greener concluded: "It would be 'poetic justice' to see a Negro-American civilization redeeming Africa. The antipathy formerly felt by the Negro-American to colonization has passed away. He now sees clearly that to civilize Africa is to exalt the Negro race."⁴⁰ Greener seemed to be implying that one way Black Americans could be respected in America was to help change the status of Africans, thereby giving Africans as well as themselves dignity and respect. Reverend Rufus L. Perry argued that Black Americans should contribute to Africa our arts and science. Moreover, declared Perry, we should send skilled teachers to instruct the indigenous population.⁴¹ Booker T. Washington also thought that the best way to help Liberia and Africa was through scientific and industrial education. He wrote J. L. Morris, editor of the Liberian Register, that "a large proportion of the brightest men and women should receive scientific, technical and industrial education in order to enable them to understand and master these [Liberian] natural resources."⁴² Washington saw Liberian's problems as being the same as those of Black Americans. He thereby advocated the same solution. At least one Black woman, Amanda Berry Smith, who had been a missionary in Liberia, submitted that "only educated Blacks should go to Liberia."⁴³ Many Blacks were convinced that if Liberians and other Africans were given the 'proper' education they would rise to the heights of Western civilization.

37. Drake, "Negro Americans and the African Interest."

38. T. McCants Stewart, LIBERIA: THE AMERICO-AFRICAN REPUBLIC (New York, 1886), 101-105.

39. AFRICAN REPOSITORY, LXIV (July 1888), 103.

40. IBID.

41. A.M.E. CHURCH REVIEW, II (July 1885), 69-71.

42. The Booker T. Washington Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (hereafter BTW Papers), Box 428.

43. Amanda Berry Smith, THE STORY OF THE LORD'S DEALING WITH MRS. AMANDA SMITH, THE COLORED EVANGELIST (Chicago, 1893), 451-453.

Though more general than Christianizing and civilizing, ethnic identification was a significant aspect of the African image. Throughout the history of Black people in America, there was the basic realization among them that they were at least partly African themselves. As Drake, Du Bois, Herskovits and others have observed, "black Americans have never been allowed to forget their African origins."⁴⁴ Blacks founded 'African' churches, lodges, improvement and benevolent societies and identified with the 'fatherland' only after the dominant whites had indicated, in no uncertain terms, they could not endure any suggestion of equality between the two races.⁴⁵ Having been generally rejected, there was no alternative except to establish institutions which would make it possible for them to achieve solidarity, status, self-esteem, respectability, dignity and happiness.⁴⁶ Ethnic identification in such institutions was expressed in such names as the African Society, The African American League, The African Friendly Society, Sons of Africa, African Female Band Benevolent Society, African Daughters of Ethiopia, Daughters of Zion Angolian Ethiopian Society, African Methodist Episcopal Church, African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church and the African Orthodox Church.

Another form of ethnic identification is reflected in organizations devoted to scholarly or cultural pursuit relative to Africa, or to Africans and Black Americans. The American Negro Academy was organized in 1897. According to its constitution, "This Academy is an organization of authors, scholars, artists, and those distinguished in other walks of life, men of African descent, for the promotion of letters, science and art; for the creation, as far as possible, of a form of intellectual taste..." This organization was not only concerned about scholarship that dealt with Black Americans but Africa and Africans as well. The Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, founded in 1915, was another organization that was concerned with scholarship and research about Blacks in the United States and Africa. There was also The Negro Society for Historical Research and The American Society of African Culture.

44. Drake, "Negro Americans and the African Interest," 663; See also Isaac, "The American Negro and Africa," 219-233; W.E.B. Du Bois, *THE SOULS OF BLACK FOLK* (New York, 1969), 45-55; Melville J. Herskovits, *THE MYTH OF THE NEGRO PAST* (Boston, 1969), 1-14.

45. Felix Okaye, "The Afro-American and Africa," in Henry J. Richards, ed., *TOPICS IN AFRO-AMERICAN STUDIES* (Buffalo, 1971), 38.

46. *IBID.*

Some Blacks identified with Liberia symbolically, even romantically. A. L. Ridgel observed the undeniable fact that Africa is the Blacks' ancestral home. "In whatever countries they wander," he continued, "their ancestry runs back to this country."⁴⁷ Reverend Ackrell E. White, who had been a missionary in Africa, wrote a letter to the *Southern Workman*: "The time will come when every Black man will look to Africa as his country and his home..."⁴⁸ E. Jackson, expressed the feelings of some Blacks when he wrote the American Colonization Society in 1891, that "we feel like children away from home and are anxious to get home. We are quite sure that the United States of America is not the place for the colored man."⁴⁹ Even Du Bois noted when he was a child that "with Africa I had only one direct cultural connection and that was the African melody which my great-grandmother violently used to sing."⁵⁰ As an adult, continued Dr. Du Bois, "I felt myself African by 'race' and by that token was African and an integral member of a group of dark Americans who were called Negroes."⁵¹

Meier and Rudwick noted that although most Blacks were proud of the greatness of ancient Africa, those who had a sympathetic attitude toward Africa also held a favorable feeling about contemporary Africans. Reverend Alexander Crummell, considered by many as the leading Black intellectual in the nineteenth century, had been a missionary in Liberia. He was angry that Whites and Blacks were hostile to Liberia. This led him to say in 1891 that "it is very common now-a-days to hear this little Republic referred to as evidencing the incapacity of the Negro for free government, and nothing is more constant, nothing more frequent than the declaration that 'Liberia is a failure!' ... Nothing can be more ignorant, nothing more stupid than these utterances."⁵²

Some Blacks acknowledged that Liberia and Africa was less "advanced" than Europe. This situation, however, was not seen as a result of any lack of capabilities on the part of Africans but rather as interference from White Europeans. John Henry Smyth, a former U.S. Minister to Liberia, argued that "the actual appalling state of things

47. Cited in D.J. Flummer, *THE NEGRO AND LIBERIA* (Birmingham, 1897), 10.

48. *SOUTHERN WORKMAN*, (January, 1883), 9.

49. Redkey, *BLACK EXODUS*, 8.

50. Du Bois, *SOULS OF BLACK FOLK*, 114-117.

51. *IBID.*, 115.

52. Alexander Crummell, *AFRICA AND AMERICA: ADDRESSES AND DISCOURSES* (Springfield, 1891), v.

in Africa is the result of the policy of Europeans toward the African races."⁵³ Writing in 1888 William T. Alexander, claimed that "The White man's influence among them has been bad... Until the invasion of the White man, they were true children of nature. In their native land they were brave, and fought desperately for liberty."⁵⁴ Historian Alexander argued that the evil existing in Africa was the result of the intrusiveness of White outsiders. Moreover, the Africans were happy with their 'traditional' way of living. An editorial appeared in the Black newspaper The New York Age that supported the position that the Europeans should not interfere in African affairs. It declared: "None of the European governments have any right in Africa. They are only there for what they can get out of it. They rule by conquest and subsist on spoilation."⁵⁵ Another well-known Black publication The Colored American also protested against the extreme measures used by European colonizers in Africa.⁵⁶

Although some Black Americans identified with Africa romantically, others wanted to do something constructively to help themselves and Africans. Between 1886 and 1915 a number of organizations and companies were formed to carry on commercial and trade relations with Liberia and other parts of Africa. In 1886 Stewart declared "Soon Negro capital should send at least a brig to carry our civilization in the form of workers for Africa, and to carry tobacco, cloth, hardware, and provisions to Liberia, and bring thence the riches of that favored land... It will give a new impetus to industry to Liberia and to enterprise here."⁵⁷ Bishop Turner thought that "if the Black man ever rises to wealth, he will either do it in Africa, or as he operates in connection with Africa."⁵⁸ While Turner was in Liberia he wrote back to Black "capitalists" in the United States that if they would start trading with Liberia they would be worth millions in a few years. Few Blacks with money took his offer. A group of Blacks, however did organize the

53. Bowen, AFRICA AND THE AMERICAN NEGRO, 74.

54. William T. Alexander, HISTORY OF THE COLORED RACE IN AMERICA (Kansas City, 1888), 9.

55. NEW YORK AGE (January 31, 1907), 4.

56. THE COLORED AMERICAN (March 1907), 167; THE COLORED AMERICAN (April 1909), 231; THE COLORED AMERICAN (September 1909), 175; See also THE NEW YORK AGE (January 31, 1907), 5.

57. Stewart, LIBERIA, 105.

58. H. M. Turner, AFRICA LETTERS (Nashville, 1893), 58-59.

African Development Society in 1899. Its chief objective was for Black Americans to buy land and settle in East Central Africa. The Society was going to sell shares in the form of land rights but only to Afro-American or African purchasers. The Society's prospectus painted an attractive scene: "Whereas certain Christian natives of East Central Africa have sent messengers to the Afro-American people, hearing a petition, asking their co-operation and direction in the development of the rich resources of their country, and ... the market easy of access and the present opportunities of vast importance to the Afro-American people, ..."59 In 1904 came word of the formation of the African Trading Company which intended to facilitate commerce and emigration. About the same time the New York and Liberia Steamship Company announced its intention to start a ship for Africa. The American and West African Steamship Company also existed for a time. Later the Liberian Trading and Emigration Association of the U.S.A. was established. In 1907 a group of Blacks under the leadership of Walter F. Walker, organized the Liberian Development Association for progressive emigration of the American Negro, the economic, industrial and social improvement of Liberia, and the cultivation of her hinterland."60 Francis H. Warren of Detroit, Michigan wrote a letter to the editor of The New York Age, in the same year, and stated "he chose to go to Liberia and hoped to enlist a sufficient number of Afro-Americans in the cause to bring about the necessary change in the fiscal policy of that beautiful country."61 In December 1913 a group of Blacks organized the African Union Company which proposed to handle African products on a large scale and establish mercantile operations between Africa and the markets of the world. Emmett J. Scott, private secretary to Booker T. Washington, and ex-member of the U.S. Liberian Commission, was a Director of the African Union Company. None of the organizations or companies, however, carried on any meaningful commercial relations with Liberia and other parts of the continent even though extensive and positive plans were made. The major factor seemed to be lack of sufficient capital and support on the part of most Blacks. There were few wealthy Blacks in the U.S. at this time, and those that did have money were not interested in investing it in a 'foreign country.' Moreover, public opinion was unfavorable to the organizations. Many White newspapers and some Black ones publicized

59. Adelaide Hill and Martin Kilson, eds., APROPOS OF AFRICA: AFRO-AMERICAN LEADERS AND THE ROMANCE OF AFRICA (New York, 1971), 192-194.

60. Redkey, BLACK EXODUS, 283

61. NEW YORK AGE, (January 24, 1907), 4.

the schemes as foolish or fraudulent, misguided or tragic, and unrealistic or unwise.

No topics on Black Americans thought for the years 1888 to 1914 can properly be discussed without taking into account the two most widely known and influential Black men in America - Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois. Washington is best known for his philosophy on industrial education for Blacks and through his Atlanta Compromise speech. Washington's involvement in African affairs included sending Black technicians to Togo and the Sudan, giving support to the Congo Reform Movement, and helping to establish industrial training schools in Africa.⁶² Even though Washington expressed an interest in other African countries, it was in Liberia that he played his greatest African role. When Liberia was having internal financial and diplomatic problems with other European colonial powers, it was Washington's personal influence that brought about a settlement. Washington helped Liberia secure an international loan of \$1,500,000 from four American banks to help pay off its foreign debt.⁶³ According to Louis Harlan, even this move on his behalf of Liberia left it little more than a colony of the United States.⁶⁴ Washington did not mind it becoming a colony, for he thought that Liberia needed the protection of the United States.

It is extremely difficult to know how Washington felt about Liberia. At one time he would say and do one thing and at another instance he would do something entirely different. For example, Washington's interest in Liberia is expressed in the speech he made in 1908 sponsored by the Washington (D.C.) Negro Business League held at the Lincoln Temple Memorial Congregational Church. Washington introduced the five Liberian envoys who had come to the United States to seek governmental assistance. He also made a short address: "I am glad to be with you tonight, and help welcome these estimable and loveable men from Africa. They are here in Washington on an official visit, not merely as envoys of their land, but as representatives of the entire Negro race. To a vast degree we are deeply interested in affairs affecting them, as they must necessarily be interested in our welfare and advancement."⁶⁵ The Alabama educator continued by suggesting that "to a large degree their success and their failure is our

62. Louis R. Harlan, "Booker T. Washington and the White Man's Burden," *AMERICAN HISTORICAL REVIEW*, LXXI (January 1966), 452-455.

63. *IBID.*

64. *IBID.*

65. *LIBERIAN BULLETIN* (November 1908), 64-65.

failure. If their country succeeds, so much in that degree does the race succeed. And if their country fails, so much in that degree does the race fail."⁶⁶ This speech clearly suggests that Washington acknowledged the close bond of union between Liberians and Black Americans and the problems that faced both. Yet, his attitude was that of redemption and paternalism rather than accepting them as they were. This attitude, however, was shared by many Blacks. Washington was aware that any financial assistance given by the United States to Liberia would be temporary and that Liberia would have to develop its own resources - mainly through self-help and industrial education. Even though Washington encouraged American capital in Liberia - both governments and private - he refused to invest himself or lend his name to projects that were organized to invest there.⁶⁷ In 1912 Washington chaired his International Conference on the Negro at Tuskegee. The purpose of the conference was to devise means for the systematic and harmonious extension of industrial training in Africa.⁶⁸ The three day meeting attracted delegates from Africa as well as the United States. It is not clear as to what the conference actually accomplished. Two aspects, however, are noteworthy: it was unequivocally clear that Washington was still convinced that industrial education was the answer to Africa's basic problems and he expressed it in no uncertain terms; and that many Black Americans still saw Washington as trying to appease the White colonial powers by not making any emphatic protest to them. Harlan perhaps best summed up Washington's attitude about Liberia when he concluded: "He remained a social pacifist for whom industrial education was a universal panacea. Its method and ethos seemed to him as applicable to African problems as to those of American Negroes."⁶⁹

It is not clear what W. E. B. Du Bois's attitude was about Liberia between the years 1888-1914. There is evidence, however, of his opinion about Africa. Du Bois admitted "there was always a lack of interest, a neglect, a resentment at being classed as African when Negroes felt that they were Americans."⁷⁰ He continued, "I did not myself begin actively to study Africa until 1908 or 1910."⁷¹ In 1896,

66. IBID.

67. BTW Papers, Box 905. The author is deeply indebted to Louis R. Harlan for his assistance in researching these papers.

68. BTW Papers, Box 30, 917.

69. Harlan, "Booker T. Washington," 467.

70. Quoted in Harold R. Isaacs, *THE NEW WORLD OF NEGRO AMERICANS* (New York, 1963), 207.

71. IBID.

Du Bois's Ph.D. dissertation, The Suppression of the African Slave Trade, was published by Harvard University. Even though it is very much a scholarly and academic work, the subject indicates his early interest in Black people and a world-view of their "hopes and aspirations." As early as 1897 we see Du Bois's Pan-Negroism having international implications. He saw the role of Blacks as "the advance guard of the Negro people - 8,000,000 of Negro blood in the United States of America - must soon come to realize that if they are to take their place in the van of Pan-Negroism, then their destiny is not absorption by the white American ... (and) then their destiny is not a servile imitation of Anglo-Saxon culture, but a stalwart originatlity which shall follow Negro ideals."⁷² He continued to argue that the Negro people as a race have a contribution to make to civilization and humanity which no other race can make.⁷³

In 1900 two events occurred that clearly shows that Du Bois was developing an ideological identity with people of color. First, he attended the First Pan-African Conference in London along with eleven other Black Americans, nine Black West Indians, six people from England, and four Africans, including F. E. R. Johnson of Liberia. This conference protested against colonial mistreatment of Afficans and eventual independence for African countries. Second, it was here that Du Bois made his now famous dictum: "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line - the relation of the darker to the higher races of men in Asia and Africa, in American and the islands of the sea."

Even though Du Bois was involved and was mainly concerned with race relations between Blacks and Whites in America between 1900-1914, he did not forget about his interest in Africa. In 1911 he wrote The Negro. In it he attempted to synthesize the elements of African history and showed that Africa had a past. Surprisingly, eight out of the twelve chapters in the book were devoted to Africa. George Shepperson argued that The Negro reveals the development of Du Bois's attitudes towards and thought upon Pan-Africanism in the period between 1900-1919.⁷⁴ According to Shepperson Du Bois had also envisaged an Encyclopedia Africana as early as 1909.⁷⁵ This work was never completed, even though he published a preparatory work in 1945.

72. THE CONSERVATION OF RACE. Occasional Papers, Number 2 (Washington, D.C.: The American Negro Academy, 1897), 10-14.

73. IBID.

74. W. E. B. Du Bois, THE NEGRO, with a new introduction by George Shepperson (New York, 1970), xxii.

Du Bois more than any other man kept the spirit of Pan-Africanism alive for more than four decades. It is also clear that the experience of Du Bois at the Pan-African Conference of 1900 reinforced his ability to see the interconnections between the freedom of the Africans in Africa and the recognition of the equality of Blacks everywhere.⁷⁶ Yet, as Redkey argues, if Du Bois was uncertain about his relationship to Africa, most others shared his paralyzed sympathy for the fatherland.⁷⁷

Du Bois's Pan-Africanism supplanted Bishop Turner's back-to-Africa idea, and Washington's industrial education and accommodation philosophies replaced earlier Black Christian missions to Liberia and Africa. While Washington's philosophies gradually faded after his death, the Christian missions remained a major concern for many Black Americans. Du Bois lived to see Pan-Africanism take form and substance, even though it still did not involve most Blacks in the current affairs of Africa. Emigration, as stated previously, did not gain national attention again until the Garvey movement of the early twenties.

These four basic responses emigration, Christianization, education and ethnic identification governed the attitudes about Liberia among Blacks between 1877-1914. Other Blacks may have had different concerns about Liberia, but they were exceptions and did little to change the emphasis of the majority of Blacks, who gradually acquired more factual knowledge about Liberia and the African continent. Most Blacks however, still remained unsure of their ties with the "fatherland."

The years between 1877 and 1914 were, for most Black Americans, years of despair and desperate hope as conditions of oppression toward Blacks in the United States reached its most virulent depths. Blacks were caught in a dilemma. On the one hand, some were looking forward to being assimilated into the mainstream of American society. Yet, on the other hand, they were rejected by the dominant group. Consequently, they identify once again with Africa and Liberia. At times it was not always clear what those ties were or what they meant. What

76. Clarene C. Contee, "The Emergence of Du Bois as an African Nationalist," *THE JOURNAL OF NEGRO HISTORY*, LIV (1969), 60.

77. Redkey, "The Meaning of Africa to Afro-Americans, 1890-1914," 26.

was clear, however, was that Blacks in America, Liberia, and the world over were oppressed by Whites. Only a few, such as Du Bois, Walters, Turner and others, understood that the fate of Black men on both continents was closely linked, that Black Americans not only could help Africans, but that Black Americans could in return be helped by Africans. This attitude, to a large degree, laid the foundation for Pan-Africanism, for Blacks realized that if they were to survive as a people they would have to work together.

THE AFRICAN ART TRADE IN MONROVIA

Blake W. Robinson

The trade in African art in Monrovia is itself something of an art. Its patterns are undoubtedly closer to what obtained in ancient Tyre than what is taught today along the banks of the Charles. In recent years, however, merchants have grown more knowledgeable about their wares and the international African art market as well. There is still, however, to an outsider an apparent randomness about the buying and selling of traditional carved objects in wood, stone and ivory and forged or cast metalwork. The objects themselves are called by the trade "stick", if made of wood, "stone" if they are carved objects in stone and, of course, "mask" if indeed they are masks. The traders themselves - and this term is only used for Africans - are called "Charleys". The same English term is commonly used in French, and it is said of a man that "il vend le bois" or "il fait les arts." The origin of the term "Charley" is unclear. Possibly it was a nickname given traders by the American troops stationed at Robertsfield during World War II.

Contrary to what is often thought and written, Monrovia is of special interest to the collector of African art due in part to its geographical position as a juncture in air routes running from Mali all the way to the Congo, that is the limits of the sculpture heartland. Overland it draws objects from neighboring Sierra Leone, Guinea and Ivory Coast as well as farther afield from Mali, Ghana and Upper Volta. An additional factor tending to direct objects to Monrovia is the complete lack of government control of the buying and selling of art. Only a relatively modest import duty is paid on objects entering the country. Added to all this is the considerable advantage, less apparent in 1975 than in previous years, of Liberia's being a dollar country and a dollar country near certain countries where consumer goods are hard to come by and the local currency difficult to convert.

The Monrovia art market is, however, on the wane. There is not a substantial number of locally based collectors nor are there frequent calls by dealers from overseas as is the case with Abidjan. In addition, as the objects themselves become fewer and more costly, pieces of any interest are often marketed directly in Europe or the United States.

MARKET STRUCTURE

The market is pyramidal with the apex formed by an exceedingly small number of African and expatriate dealers and collectors and the base formed by the people of the countryside. The vast middle section of the pyramid is made up of the countless dealers, or "Charlies," who buy and sell one to the other until an object ends up in the hands of one of the very few Monrovia dealers or collectors. The percentage of art so exchanged that stays in Liberia, even temporarily, is very small indeed. An inverse pyramid aptly represents the profit made in the acquiring and disposing of these objects, the man at the bottom and closest to the source of the objects, if not the source himself, getting the least and the dealer at top reselling on the European or American market making quite considerably more.

Expatriates and a few big African businessmen form the apex of the merchandising pyramid in Liberia. Their activities represent a concentration of capital and a volume of high quality objects. They are the generals who directly and indirectly command an army of African traders. When for instance the Bassa country really opened up, so to speak, in 1969, dozens of the small and chaste masks were being packed off weekly by air to Europe and other points. Demand in this case creates the supply. It is only now that newly carved Bundu masks, mà masks and masks of other types are appearing on the market in response to a market situation. It should be noted that in Monrovia the term "copy" or copie is used to designate a relatively new piece and has nothing to do with the authenticity of the piece. By the same token an object described to a potential customer as "too too o'" or ancien-ancien can be openly admitted by the trader probably to have been carved some five years previously.

While the bigger African dealers through overseas exposure are quite aware of international trends in the African art market, the majority seem mainly aware that visible age and signs of use plus type, such as "Dan mask" or "Nomoli", make an object pretend to a high price.

Since the very few expatriate and African buyers present in Monrovia are the only outlet for pieces of particular value, they have been up to now able to control the market rather effectively. More and more, however, knowledgeable African merchants are eschewing the local middlemen, and if they have the means are marketing directly overseas.

A few merchants, and they are relatively few these days, go out themselves along rather well worn routes into Grand Bassa, Nimba, Grand Gedeh and Maryland counties. They tend to stick to the main

villages where they probably have contacts and where strangers are a fairly usual phenomenon. Of all the counties the Kru Coast up to now seems the least frequented by the dealers. They probably tend not to go there since transportation between villages is difficult and the Kru are not yet too receptive to bartering away their traditional objects. Since they are strangers, the merchants hire guides and interpreters from among the local population. These tend more often than not to be youngsters who have rather a diminished sense of awe for traditional objects, whether cult or not, and who have a ready appreciation for things the money economy has brought such as lanterns, cutlasses and clothes.

The supply of objects tends to fluctuate with the nearness of the harvest season and with the collection of taxes in the rural areas. In times of great need, many real treasures are sacrificed to traders, a common situation world wide when times are hard.

As the supply of objects from Liberia is now drying up, merchants are finding it less worth their while to go themselves to beat the bush. A frequent complaint heard is that a man has spent several days on the road only to get one or two mediocre masks that if saleable will bring him no profit or scant profit over the cost of the trip.

Rarity of objects and the time and distance involved in finding them added to growing sophistication in the countryside have caused bush prices to go up considerably and the outlay needed by the "Charley" middlemen as well. As the market becomes more and more specialized the small to middling traders are being forced out. Except for odd pieces gotten through luck or special contacts, they no longer have the wherewithal to buy good authentic pieces or to subsidize the longer and more arduous hunting trips to the bush to acquire objects. They must depend then on the broader tourist market in "chi-wara," "kple-kple" masks or "warri" boards of patently recent fabrication.

Countrymen do make their way to Monrovia with masks and other objects. These men are referred to as "customers" or in French clients by the Monrovia merchants. Often the Liberians from the countryside will know one particular merchant with whom they are used to dealing and with whom they will liquidate their stock generally for something over the cost of their transportation to Monrovia. If their friend is out of town or if they cannot agree on a price, they will show their things at the various kiosks with tourist objects on Broad and Carey Streets until they have made a sale.

While the interior of Liberia is still a source of supply of good quality traditional sculpture, Liberia is small and thinly pop-

ulated. Non-Liberian objects are even more important on the local market. Objects come particularly from bordering Sierra Leone, Guinea and Ivory Coast. Sculpture is often a subsidiary interest for diamond and cattle merchants, as well as truckers. The trucks of ONAH (Office National des Hydrocarburants) that come down to the port of Monrovia to get gasoline to take back to Nzérékoré sometimes bring their share of yiri koro (Mandingo "old wood") in addition to sacks of plantains and other produce. The carved steatite heads and figures, so-called "nomoli," from Sierra Leone are often found in conjunction with digging for diamonds. Their value is more and more recognized in the countryside. Traffickers in ivory from Ivory Coast will bring Dan and Guéré masks, cast brass pieces and sculpture. Cattle dealers coming from Mali and Guinea can travel with a few Bambara and Dogon pieces. The same can be said of the crocodile skin merchants who ply between Sierra Leone, Liberia and Ivory Coast. As economic and political conditions in Guinea vary, more and more objects make their way into the hard currency market in Liberia. Regrettably, real treasures from the Guinean government's collections have been purloined, particularly from the nearby Nzérékoré Museum. One thinks inevitably and with regret over the dispersal of the Leopoldville (Kinshasa) and Stanleyville (Kisangani) national collections during the "events" in 1960.

A sign of the great sophistication of the African art market in Africa itself these days is this inter-African traffic. Sierra Leonean "nomoli" are arriving in Liberia to be sold, and both Liberian and Sierra Leonean Sande society (trade name "Bundu") masks are being exported to Abidjan where they are reputed to fetch higher prices. By the same token, certain objects from western Ivory Coast make their way to Monrovia for resale. Partly this is due to the proximity and ease of travel to Monrovia plus the apparent greater preference of "Americans," i.e. foreigners in Monrovia, for the grotesque in the form of Guéré masks while the French in Abidjan are partial to the patinated elegance of Dan masks.

THE TRADERS

The Monrovia traders in sculpture are exclusively foreign. They are predominantly Guinean and Malian, there being in addition a small but important group of Nigerians. Ethnically, they tend to be Mandingo (both Mandinka Ba and Mandinka Mori), Marka, Bambara, Fula and Hausa. There are virtually no Liberian-born Mandingo, who are predominantly Konyaka, in the trade. Liberians tend to call all French-speaking people from the savannah region Mandingo unless, of course they are very "red" and are clearly Fula. Liberians only enter the art market

as original suppliers of objects, or very rarely, as ultimate buyers.

The merchants tend to be almost exclusively Muslim, many having attended Koranic schools. Many are illiterate in a western language or for that matter modern Arabic. The Hausa, however, are usually literate in their language. Among themselves the lingua franca is Mandingo, French or English; among Liberian "clients" English; and among non-African buyers French or English.

It is possible to speak of a few merchant "houses" structured along family lines headed by an older man generally with considerable experience in the trade whom his young associates regard as their "uncle". While there are shops of African art, particularly along Broad and Cary streets most deals are conducted in the office or home where traders bring the objects.

It is quite common for an established merchant, generally a mature man with many years residence in Liberia and quite possibly a Liberian citizen, to have grouped around him several dozen younger men in some way related to him by blood. These young men act as his agents in disposing of articles from his stock. Their profit is the difference between the price put on the object by their "uncle" and their selling price. In time these young men develop their own contacts with people coming from up country, and the capital (or credit) as well, to do some business of their own on the side. The unmarried ones will generally take their meals with their "uncle," will share a rented room with a friend, so that their living expenses are rather modest. All the same, they live quite precariously, no more so it must be added, than a majority of Monrovia youth.

The half dozen or so big merchants in Monrovia tend more and more to send their best pieces overseas directly to clients in Europe or the United States or more commonly to a relative resident there. Many of them also travel on their own to New York, Amsterdam, Geneva and Paris to sell their goods. It is Brussels, however, rather than New York or Paris that these days appears to be the center of the international African art market. The merchants also go on buying trips to other African countries, in particular Nigeria and Cameroun, to gather objects for resale outside of Africa.

The Monrovia market for objects of quality is very small, there being for all practical purposes only a handful of dealers and collectors with both the requisite knowledge and capital for substantial buying. Therefore, particularly as quality objects themselves grow rarer and more expensive for the African middleman to acquire, the objects go directly overseas. Thus, articles tend to find their natural market.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

The flight of art and artifacts from Liberia and from a whole cluster of countries through Liberia has been compared to the trade in human beings that obtained from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries between Africa, Europe, the Near East and the New World. While lacking the horror of the other, this commerce is not the less lamentable.

It can be argued that the massive exportation of these objects does at least preserve them for posterity - and from the ravages of a tropical climate and the hazards of changing village attitudes - witness the treasures gathered by Frobenius. Yet for the increase of knowledge as well as for the fostering of cultural growth and identity in Africa as elsewhere their export is to be decried and discouraged.

While legislating the conditions for the export of cultural objects would be a step in the right direction, it alone clearly will not prevent the continuing exodus. A cadre of well paid and trained customs officers and museum officials is very much needed. A sizeable national budget for the acquisition of objects is also required, so that an alternative to the itinerant sculpture scrounger is offered to the countryman possessing an art object. Probably, however, even more important than legislation, and trained specialists is investment in instilling pride in the material culture of the Liberian peoples as the representation of a heritage of continuing consequence. Without this, particularly as Westernization spreads objects will continue to flee, and will not be missed except by a few Liberian intellectuals and sentimental expatriates.

The creation of provincial cultural centers, advocated by such a distinguished Liberian cultural leader as the Hon. Bai T. Moore, might be a step in the right direction. What is needed is a neutral and middle ground where the educated and "educating" percentage of the population for whom the objects in question are changing rapidly in status, value and consideration would have the opportunity to see them afresh in the context of a plus factor for education, the growth of a national culture and even nation building. The forced collection of objects as witnessed in neighboring Guinea is probably not a satisfactory path to take in the long run. Much of the museum work in Nigeria, in Kenya, in the United States as well as in Eastern Europe might provide valuable lessons. The impetus, the felt need not only to preserve and conserve but to use Liberian art as an adjunct to education and development, can only be Liberian. And the way taken to accomplish this can only be Liberian.

While this brief essay was intended to be descriptive of the current African art market, it has inevitably strayed into policy pastures. If that has happened it is because what is happening to traditional African art and artifacts appears much more important than how. Yet it is hoped that some knowledge of how that art market works may help lead to rational and productive regulation of it in the future.



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A NOTE ON 'KANRE LAHUN'

Arthur Abraham

Since 1890 when the first 'white man' visited it, Kanre Lahun has been used in most records to denote Kailahun, the capital which Kai Londo, a Kissi warrior, built after successfully defending Luawa in Mende country adjacent to Kissi country about 1880. In the Kpo-veh wars¹ that were going on at the time, Kai not only saved Luawa from the most prominent aggressor of the time, Ndawa, and his lieutenants, such as Mbawulomeh, but began campaigns of territorial expansion, which led to the creation of a greater Luawa. Rewarded with sovereignty over the state for defending it, Kai London was not a bureaucrat. He remained true to his chivalrous traditon, and he took ill and died while conducting a campaign in 1895.²

Kai Londo signed a treaty of friendship with the British in 1891, but by the Anglo-French agreement of 1895 which delimited the boundary between their respective spheres of influence at 14 degrees west of Paris, Luawa was bisected into two, with the capital Kailahun

1. The Kpo-veh wars began about 1880 with the onslaught of Ndawa against Benya of Blama. Kpo-veh literally means 'dung-pot', and the wars got this name because those who tried to escape from it were made to carry a pot of excrement when caught!

2. Pendembu District Intelligence Book, p. 29, Sierra Leone Government Archives; N.C. Hollins, "A Short History of Luawa Chiefdom," SIERRA LEONE STUDIES, (June 1929); W.R.E. Clarke, "The Foundation of Luawa Chiefdom," SIERRA LEONE STUDIES, (June 1958); Protectorate Literature Bureau, KAILONDO K&N NDAWA (Bo, 1953); Max Corvie, OUR PEOPLES OF THE SIERRA LEONE PROTECTORATE (Lutherworth Press, 1944); Arthur Abraham, "The Rise of Traditional Leadership among the Mende: A Study in Acquisition of Political Power," M.A. Thesis, University of Sierra Leone; T. J. Alldridge, THE SHERBRO AND ITS HINTERLAND (London, 1901); K. Wylie, "Innovation and Change in Mende Chieftaincy 1880-1896," JOURNAL OF AFRICAN HISTORY, (1969); M. J. McCall, "History of Luawa," Ph. D. dissertation, York University, 1975.

itself, three miles in Liberian territory. This balkanization was an immoral breach of faith that caused untold hardship to Kai Londo's successor, Fa Bundeh, and was only amended in 1911 and finally ratified in 1917.³ This brought the whole of Luawa, though not greater Luawa, under the British colonial administration of Sierra Leone. Throughout the colonial period, Kanre Lahun continued to be used instead of Kailahun, which literally means "in the town of Kai." Why this was so, is a moot question, and scholars are presently drawing attention to it.⁴

The first European to visit Kailahun was British Travelling Commissioner T. J. Alldridge who was also the first to write about the area. He was appointed in 1890 to make treaties with the rulers in the adjacent hinterland of the Sherbro, and he wrote Kanre Lahun not only in the treaty, but in all his correspondence.⁵ In 1891, a map appeared showing the areas traversed by Alldridge, on which was clearly written Kanre La-un for Kailahun.⁶ Since Alldridge's first recording, the spelling (and thus the identification of the place) quickly hardened into tradition.

In a correspondence to the Provincial Commissioner in 1924, District Commissioner N.C. Hollins explained quite correctly that Kai Londo built the town and "called it 'Kailundu's town' or in Mendi, Kailundu Lahun, abbreviated into Kailahun," but he added in brackets "spelled also Kanre Lahun."⁷ This shows that while he realised that the correct name is Kailahun, he was diffident to challenge the established Kanre Lahun, which had already been in use for over three decades.

3. See Arthur Abraham, "Mende Government and Politics under Colonial Rule, 1890-1937," Ph.D. dissertation, Birmingham University, 1974, 414-420.

4. K.C. Wylie, "The Politics of Transformation: Indirect Rule in Mendeland and Abuja, 1890-1914," Ph.D. dissertation, Michigan State University, 1967, 173; Abraham, "Traditional Leadership," 89, n.25; C. Fyfe, Centre of African Studies, University of Edinburgh, personal communication, 1970; M.J. McCall, Department of History, York University, personal communication, 1971.

5. Public Record Office, London, C.O. 267/383/248, enclosure.

6. C.O. 267/388/239, enclosure; also reproduced at the end of THE SHEBRO.

7. Correspondence, D.C.N.C.Hollins of Pendembu District to the Commissioner of the Southern Province, 24 May 1924, Kailahun District Office records, uncatalogued file of miscellaneous correspondence.

It would appear that Kanre Lahun originated from a phonetic difficulty. As Alldridge himself admitted, "... the difficulties I had to encounter in order to catch the right pronunciation of native names seemed insuperable; for there were so many styles of speaking, so many contractions [as Kailahun is] and so many local and personal peculiarities, that it appeared next to impossible to get any name correctly."⁸ Kai could also quite correctly have been Ka-ê, and since the British had the habit of anglicization, inserting R where the Mende either have no R or use an L, then it is easy to see how Ka-ê could have become Kare. In a despatch to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Chamberlain, in 1896, Governor F. Cardew emphasised that the name is "KARE LA HUN and not KANRE LAHUN" as stated on the map which he enclosed.⁹ Kare Lahun is a fair enough anglicization of Kailahun, but where the N sound found its appearance in Kanre Lahun, would seem to have been Alldridge's particular difficulty; for writing again in 1898 about Kanyoni of Pendembu, he entered Kanre Wuni.¹⁰

Yet once the first few entries in the official documents followed Alldridge's version of Kanre Lahun in the early years, it became a tradition which persisted ubiquitously in all references to Kailahun. Cardew's was a forlorn attempt that was only addressed to the Colonial Office and not to the colonial officials in Sierra Leone. Certainly this was no problem to occupy the attention of the colonial administration. Very many African names were mis-spelled and mispronounced. The problem is with us today - those involved in Africanist research - in identifying the places or people whose names are incorrectly put down in the records.

8. THE SHERBRO, 345.

9. Governor's Despatches to the Secretary of State, 19, 1896, Sierra Leone Government Archives.

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Harrison Akingbade, Doctoral Candidate in History, Howard University, is finishing a dissertation on "The Role of the Military in the Colonization and Development of Liberia."

Lenwood Davis, Assistant Professor, Department of Black Studies, Ohio State University, continues his interest in Black American Relationships with Liberia.

James M. Gifford, Doctoral Candidate in History, University of Georgia, is currently completing a dissertation on "The African Colonization Movement in Georgia, 1817-1860," and maintains an interest in both Liberian immigrants' American background, as well as the settler pioneer experience in Liberia.

Thomas E. Hayden, S.M.A., Academic Dean, Maryknoll Seminary, whose Ph.D. dissertation at Howard University in Anthropology is "Changing Marriage Patterns among the Sikleo Kru," has an on-going interest in Kru religious patterns as they affect birth, death, ancestors and witchcraft.

Eva N. Hodgson, Associate Professor, Essex County College, is completing a Ph.D. dissertation at Columbia University on the subject "Presbyterian Missionary Effort in Liberia, 1833-1900."

Svend E. Holsoe, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Delaware, is finishing a biography of Edward James Royce and working on two papers, 1) Vai Occupational Continuities - Traditional to Modern, & 2) An Ethnic Boundary between the Vai and the American Settlers: Two Viewpoints.

Allen Howard, Assistant Professor, Department of History, Livingston College, Rutgers University, maintains an interest in the economic interrelationships between traditional Sierra Leonean and Liberian peoples.

William B. Kory, Assistant Professor, Department of Geography, University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown, is currently working on two projects: 1) an analysis of the current Liberian census, & 2) Liberian boundary problems.

Randall M. Miller, Assistant Professor of History, St. Joseph's College, Philadelphia, is currently working on letters from ex-slaves in Liberia.

Willi Schulze, Professor of Geography, Justus Liebig-Universität, Giessen, continues his interest in rubber plantations and plantation workers in West Africa.

