
VOLUME X

1984-1985

NUMBER 2

**LIBERIAN STUDIES
JOURNAL**

By THE LIBERIAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION, INC.

VOLUME X

1984-1985

NUMBER 2

LIBERIAN STUDIES JOURNAL

Editor
D. Elwood Dunn
University of the South

Associate Editor
Similih M. Cordor
Kennesaw College

Book Review Editor
Dalvan M. Coger
Memphis State University

EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD

Bertha B. Azango
University of Liberia

Lawrence B. Breitborde
Beloit College

Christopher Clapham
Lancaster University

Warren L. d'Azevedo
University of Nevada Reno

Joseph S. Guannu
Cuttington University College

Thomas E. Hayden
Society of African Missions

Svend E. Holsoe
University of Delaware

J. Gus Liebenow
Indiana University

Corann Okorodudu
Glassboro State College

Edited at the Department of Political Science, University of the South

CONTENTS

	Page
THE AMERICAN COLONIZATION SOCIETY AND THE SOCIO-RELIGIOUS CHARACTERIZATION OF LIBERIA: A HISTORICAL SURVEY 1822-1900.	1
by Amos J. Beyan	
VAI OCCUPATIONAL CONTINUITIES: TRADITIONAL TO MODERN.	12
by Svend E. Holsoe	
AMERICAN DISTRICT COMMISSIONERS ON THE LIBERIAN FRONTIER.	24
by Dalvan M. Coger	
THE CONDUCT OF LIBERIA'S FOREIGN POLICY DURING THE TOLBERT ADMINISTRATION: AN EXAMINATION OF THE INSTITUTIONS AND INSTRUMENTS.	39
by George K. Kieh, Jr.	
BOOK REVIEWS	
Hlophe, Stephen S., <u>Class, Ethnicity And Politics In Liberia: A Class Analysis Of Power Struggles In The Tubman And Tolbert Administrations From 1944-1975</u>	52
by Alfred B. Konuwa	
van der Kraaij, F. P. M., <u>The Open Door Policy of Liberia: An Economic History of Modern Liberia.</u>	55
by Arthur J. Knoll	
NEW BOOKS ON LIBERIA.	58
CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE.	59

A referee journal that emphasizes the social sciences and humanities, the LIBERIAN STUDIES JOURNAL is a semiannual publication devoted to studies of Africa's oldest republic. The annual subscription rate is \$20.00, \$12.00 for students and \$20.00 for institutions, and includes membership in the Liberian Studies Association, Inc. All manuscripts and related matters should be addressed to The Editor, Liberian Studies Journal, Department of Political Science, University of the South, Sewanee, TN 37375. Subscriptions and other business matters should be directed to The Executive Secretary, Liberian Studies Association, 815 South Wisconsin, Oak Park, Illinois 60304. The views expressed herein are those of the individual contributors and do not necessarily reflect those of the editor or the Liberian Studies Association, Inc.

Copyright 1985 by the Liberian Studies Association, Inc.
ISSN 0024-1989

The American Colonization Society and the Socio-Religious
Characterization of Liberia: A Historical Survey 1822-1900

Amos J. Beyan

Although other social arrangements, such as family ties, kinship, and group solidarity helped to give shape to its peculiar characteristics, Liberia's prescribed social behavior or etiquette was largely influenced by either the various religious values inherent in the American Colonization Society (ACS), or the ones approved by that organization. Even the settlers' family characteristics and structural forms were mostly governed by the ACS's values.¹ Indeed the religious ethos and norms of the ACS served as the main determinants of social behavior in Liberia. These values not only influenced personal behavior, but also reinforced the political culture of paternalism and the way in which the American colonists and their descendents came to view what they termed "civilization".

Many observers noted the tremendous impact of American religious values on nineteenth century Liberia. One of the most perceptive was Sir Harry Johnston, the British Africanist and later colonial administrator, who was an occasional visitor to the country in the 1880s. Sir Harry noted the all encompassing impact of religion in his descriptive book on Liberia.

With a few rare exceptions, the Americo-Liberian community suffers from religiosity . . . They are Episcopalians . . . Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Zionists, and so forth . . . They exhibit the Puritanism of New England in the eighteenth century almost unabated. Their average morality is probably no higher than that of the European nations or even of the Negroes indigenous to Liberia. But so far as outward behavior, laws, and language go, they are prudish to a truly American extent. Sparsity of clothing on the part of the natives is treated in some settlements as an offense . . . The Americo-Liberian still worships cloths as an outward and visible manifestation of Christianity and the best civilization; that is to say, the European cloths of the nineteenth century . . . No self-respecting Liberian would be seen on . . . a Sunday . . . even under a broiling sun . . . except in an immaculate black silk topper and a long black frock coat. Their women of course follow the fashion of Europe . . . 2

This quotation is not an inaccurate description of Liberia's social character, especially if it is applied to the period under consideration. The first groups of immigrants sent to what became Liberia were deeply religious. Indeed among the leaders of the immigrants was Reverend C. M. Waring, a Baptist minister, and Reverend Daniel Coker, a Methodist preacher. They were authorized by the ACS to provide for the spiritual needs of the anticipated

AMOS J. BEYAN

settlement. It is not, therefore, surprising that the Baptist Church became the first and most influential church in Liberia.³ It was followed by the Episcopal Church, which began religious activities in Liberia in 1830. By the later 1830s, the Methodist Episcopal and the Presbyterian Churches has begun missionary activities in Liberia. And by the 1880s, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and the Lutheran Church had established themselves in Liberia.⁴

The religious and secular impacts of the above denominations on Liberia were indeed enormous. Between 1822 and 1885, these denominations established churches in almost every settlement in Liberia. Most of the activities of the Baptist Church were limited to the Monrovia and Bassa settlements. The Episcopal Church was active in every settlement, even in the Maryland settlement which did not become part of Liberia until 1857. In fact, every settlement had churches or schools that were in one way or another affiliated with the above denomination. Before the 1880s, it had built beautiful, large churches in Cape Mount and Cape Palmas. Its establishment included a bishop, 18 ministers, 69 well committed catechumen, "38 day schools, 18 boarding schools, and 31 Sunday schools." About 3,000 students were enrolled in its schools.⁵

The Methodist Episcopal Church had 2,700 followers, 48 clergymen, 40 nonprofessional teachers, "59 Sunday schools," and 2,709 students in its schools.⁶ The Presbyterian Church, which began missionary performances in the same year the Methodists arrived in that country, was mainly confined to Monrovia and the Upriver settlers. The African Methodist Episcopal Church became active in Montserrado, Sinoe and Bassa Counties. The Lutheran Church carried on most of its missionary and educational activities in the Upriver region. It succeeded in establishing schools, churches, and clinics in such Upriver settlements as Whiteplains, Arthington, and Mount Coffee.⁷

The effects of the roles of the various Christian denominations on Liberia cannot be underestimated, especially if one is to understand the social characteristics of the country. As noted, the activities of these churches in Liberia were not only limited to the promotion of the gospel, they also included preparation for the secular world. The first western educational institutions were, for example, established by these denominations. In one crucial way, then, these American-based churches were indeed conveying to Liberia America's institutional values. These values included American social ethics and the concept of a "civilized" person or behavior. It is not surprising that American educational systems as "the common schools of New England, the high schools and academies of New York and lyceums and lectures of Pennsylvania" were introduced in Liberia by the above denominations.⁸

American Protestant spiritual and secular views largely comprised these educational systems. They were designed to make individuals conform to their approved social norms. One Jabez A. Burton, who headed the Methodist Seminary in Liberia, spelled out the above educational objective when he stipulated in

THE AMERICAN COLONIZATION SOCIETY

1838 that the aim of his school was "to elevate the character, suppress every wrong motive, to strengthen every good principle, and to prepare the subject . . . for ever . . ." The teachers who taught at his school were encouraged to emphasize ". . . love of order, diligence, and morality." He also added that the role of his school was ". . . one in which children can be taught--young persons receive instructions--and all be aided in their endeavors the better to serve God and their country."⁹ Indeed, the Methodist Church summarized its educational aims in Liberia this way in 1850:

The great end aimed at will be to give these youth a plain education, to lead them to adopt the modes and habits of civilized life, to train them, and rear them up as Christians, and bring them to adopt such habits of industry and economy, as that, when no longer supported by the mission, they may be found good citizens, well able to support and take care of themselves.¹⁰

The Methodist Church and other Christian churches in Liberia established educational institutions in the country to carry out the realization of such aims. Both technical and academic subjects were emphasized. The former emphasized agricultural skills, and the latter theology and traditional liberal disciplines.¹¹

Taken as a whole, the effect of religious education on Liberia was greater than those of secular teachings. There were several reasons for this. First and most important, the various denominations in Liberia tended to give more consideration to the former than the latter. Of course, this was in line with their main aim, which was to spread the gospel in Liberia. Enhancing this development was the fact that the Liberian secular leaders held that the inception of Liberia was part of God's divine plan. This view was conveyed to Liberia by the ACS, and later inherited and internalized by the people of that country.

Indeed, the internalization and articulation of the various religious views by the immigrant Liberians were without doubt systematically reinforced by the churches involved and the ACS. Those immigrants who closely identified with and effectively expressed the various religious views were, for example, made the leaders of their people. This statement could well be applied to nearly all prominent Liberian leaders who served during the period under consideration.¹² No wonder their secular views were not distinguishable from their non-secular views.

This was eloquently demonstrated during colonial Liberia and greatly emphasized in independent Liberia. All Liberia's governors from Eli Ayres to Joseph J. Roberts led Liberia almost as though that territory was a religious colony. They all appealed to the settlers to be religious and to conform to the values introduced by the various denominations in Liberia. Indeed, as early as 1827, Governor Jehudi Ashmun had recommended to the ACS that the settlers should be Christianized in the following ways:

AMOS J. BEYAN

. . . it be an influence from without, motives applied and forced upon them by the benevolent care and labor of others, which is to arouse and engage them in the great and principle work of life--the cultivation of rational and immortal natures. The precepts and doctrines of Jesus Christ, from Alpha to Omega, must be inculcated with Apostological earnestness and perseverance, and I may add, pedagogical precision, too, before they can become Christians . . .¹³

Ashmun was to add that through God's grace, an achievement ". . . so agreeable to the great ends of his moral government . . ." would be made in Liberia. He went on to conclude that the foundation of the settler's government must be "holiness".¹⁴

As suggested, the foregoing emphasis was not only heard during the colonial era, but it was also emphasized after independence. In his inaugural address, Liberia's first President, Roberts, declared, for example, that:

The Gospel, fellow citizens is yet to be preached to vast numbers inhabiting this dark continent, and I have the highest reason to believe, that was one of the great objects of the Almighty in establishing colonies, that they might be the means of introducing civilization and religion among the barbarous nations of this country; and to what work more noble could our powers be applied than that of bringing up from darkness, debasement, and misery, our fellow-men, and shedding abroad over them the light of science and Christianity.¹⁵

President Robert's successor, Stephen A. Benson, was to declare that Liberia has been blessed by God's providing leaders who were suitable for the period during which they were appointed to conduct the affairs of that country. Like all Liberian presidents, Benson maintained that the inception and destiny of Liberia were predetermined by God.¹⁶ With this view, he argued that Liberia's guiding values were to be governed by those of God. And these values were to be internalized and articulated by all Liberians. To make his call more appealing to his audience, Benson gave the illusion ". . . that there is no people . . . on earth of equal number, charged with a more important mission by Providence, and consequently upon whom devolve more weighty political and religious obligations . . . than the people of Liberia."¹⁷

Even Presidents Daniel B. Warner and Edward J. Roye, who tended to treat secular issues in secular context, were not free from the foregoing religious impulse. In his first inaugural address, President Warner declared that:

I believe that the Great Being who planted us on these shores, and who has so kindly protected us, will continue to protect us if we put our trust in Him. He will bear down and remove every hindrance

THE AMERICAN COLONIZATION SOCIETY

to our progress. The mighty wheels of His Providence are in operation, and those who will not move along with them will be ground to powder. If the cutting off of a right hand or the plucking out of a right eye be necessary to the ultimate success of Liberia in all her various interests, I believe that in the administration of Providence we shall lose that right hand and be deprived of that right eye.18

In his last inaugural address, President Warner maintained that God was the main determinant of Liberia, which, according to him, was in the interest of that country.19

President Roye, who was to a degree like Warner, also emphasized religion, though in a lesser way. Like his predecessors and nearly all those who served after him, President Roye believed that God had allowed the "cruel" enslavement of those who later immigrated to Liberia as a means of preparing them to promote western civilization and Christianity in that country. In his first and last inaugural address, President Roye declared:

Fellow citizens, I regard the Liberian nation as sacred. God has planted us here; and through all the vicissitudes of our existence, his hand has been plainly, visibly directing our affairs . . . He has subdued, over and over, our powerful foes. He has supplied our deficiencies and enlightened our ignorances . . .20

Indeed as Liberia moved toward the twentieth century, religious sentiment was increasingly becoming very dogmatic. This development, no doubt, was influenced by the fact that religion could easily be used to explain complex social issues. Liberian leaders were oftentimes inclined to attribute the economic or political failure of their country to Providence. Such a shifting of responsibility was enhanced by the acceptance of the idea that the Liberian entity was God's creation. And, of course, since this was the generally held view, it was further accepted that Liberia's social developments, whether success or failure, might have been predetermined by God.

Despite the fact that this was in no way a critical approach to the various problems that confronted Liberia, it served the Liberian leaders in one crucial way. It enabled them to easily veil their political and other mistakes. No wonder Christian thoughts and values were encouraged, or, in some cases, made compulsory in Liberia. Sunday was, for example, lawfully set aside as a day of worship and rest, and newspapers were included to provide large spaces for pointless explanations of the Old and New Testaments.21

Because the top layer of Liberian society emphasized these emerging values, those in the middle and bottom of that social order were influenced to become more receptive to them. Two factors ensured this receptive response to the above religious emphasis. As noted earlier, one of the ways of climbing Liberia's social ladder was indeed the serious acceptance and eloquent

AMOS J. BEYAN

articulation of those values put forward by the various leaders of that country. Besides, the social backgrounds of those who immigrated from the New World to Liberia were the same as the ones that were being emphasized in the latter. It is not, therefore, surprising that these values were internalized and then outwardly expressed by the masses of the immigrant Liberians.

Indeed, letters written by the Liberian settlers to their relatives, friends, or former masters in America clearly show their spiritual feelings.²² Matilda L. Lomax, an immigrant, emphasized in a letter written to her former master, John H. Cocke, that she was training her children ". . . in the fear of the Lord."²³ She went on to add that although she was not sure she would again see him on this earth, she was confident that they would meet each other in heaven.²⁴ A Monrovia settler, Robert L. Sterdivant, explained in his letter to one Sally C. Brent that the latter should tell her slaves that he was in ". . . the Land of the Living . . . God," and he and his children were being cared for by Providence.²⁵ One ordinary settler reemphasized the spiritual sentiment of Liberia when he said that:

. . . there are two principle gentlemen strictly and purely Liberian(s) which are S. A. Benson and J. J. Roberts. The light that led them this far was light from heaven. I believe that Liberia will yet stand with the other parts of the Civilized World. O praise the Lord all ye nations! Praise Him all ye people for His merciful kindness is Great toward us and the truth of the Lord endureth for ever! (P)raise the Lord!²⁶

One other settler, Washington W. McDonogh, emphasized that he was fortunate that he had not been enslaved by a non-Christian country. The effects of his religious belief and the social culture of paternalism on him were demonstrated when he maintained that ". . . praise His holy name, that my former master was not a weakened person, that he treated me as a son 'instead' of as a slave." He concluded by charging that ". . . an honest man is said to be the noblest work of his Creator. Had I been permitted to run about, as many of my age were, I should have been today as ignorant as they are; but, thanks be to my Creator, I was not."²⁷

This emphasis was further repeated by another Liberian immigrant in a letter written to his former master, thus:

. . . we thank God day and night that we cast our lot under so kind a master as you, sir, who helped us with our riches to get here, to this free and blessed land of our fathers, where the colored man can be happy, if he will . . . love and walk with God. Our hearts overflow, sir, when we think of you and all you have done for us poor black people. But the great God whom you serve, who taught us to serve, has blessed you, through many days yet to come here on earth, and will translate you when your days are ended, we trust into His heavenly kingdom. All of which, we your poor black friends here in Africa, pray for day and night.²⁸

THE AMERICAN COLONIZATION SOCIETY

In fact, most of the letters written by the immigrants to their relatives or former masters in America during the early years of settlement, reflected deep religious motivation.²⁹ Not only their social behavior was heavily influenced by the "civilized" people of America, but their outward expression of sentiment. The term "civilized" was used in Liberia, for the people who were Christians. Of course, this meant in English. The beginning of the use of the word "civilized" in Liberia in 1822.³⁰ Indeed, the term was not used in that sense until the 1960s.³¹

The fact that all the black Americans who came to Liberia were to a degree westernized, automatically described as "civilized" people. The indigenous Liberians who became acculturated into the above religious and social values were also accepted, though reluctantly, as "civilized" Liberians.³² In other words, while the "door" for the above social accommodation was opened, it was not opened wide enough to the indigenous Liberians. From 1822 until the 1960s, only a small number of them were, for example, considered as fully "civilized".³³

It must be pointed out that the few who were accommodated were consistently reminded to conceal their traditional social values and increasingly manifest their acquired ones. This explained why the indigenous Liberians who became "civilized" were nothing but imitators of the immigrant Liberians. They took, for instance, western or Christian names, spoke English, dressed and outwardly behaved like the settler Liberians. As the former, the latter tended to describe nearly every indigenous African social institution as "uncivilized," or unchristian. No wonder they could not easily be distinguished from the immigrant Liberians. This applied especially to the few indigenous "civilized" Liberians who succeeded in becoming members of the upper layers of the Liberian social stratifications.³⁴

But despite the fact that this process brought social distinction to the settler and a few of the indigenous Liberians, it had a number of serious shortcomings. As noted before, its tremendous emphasis on the Christian religion created conditions whereby the settlers and the few "civilized" indigenous Liberians began to accept that their main guiding principles should be those inherent in the above religious doctrine. Not only were they influenced by the doctrine, but they also manipulated it in ways to promote their social uniqueness and to achieve their secular objectives. But in the attempts of accomplishing this, one main social concept was reinforced that obviously was not in the interest of the development of Liberia as a whole.

The acceptance of the idea that Liberia's success or failure was indeed predetermined by Providence, first of all, created an atmosphere whereby the failures or blunders of the Liberian rulers were easily attributed to God. While this helped to secure the leverage and the leadership of the individuals in question, it made Liberia's elite unable to treat critically the various social problems of that country. No wonder the rice riot which occurred in Liberia in 1979 was described by Liberian authorities as an "act of evil spirits".³⁵

AMOS J. BEYAN

Relating to the preceding argument is that the above trend, secondly, distorted very painfully what a civilized society meant. Instead of it being viewed as a society that has achieved a relatively higher level of cultural and technological developments,³⁶ the term was defined in Liberia as those who became Christians, spoke English, and dressed or behaved like westerners.

But such a gross distortion was to have serious ill effects on Liberia. As implied before, it contributed to the feeble economic and political developments that were already shaping Liberia in a way that reinforced the cultural and technological underdevelopment of the country. This was heightened by the fact that the term, as used in the Liberian context, did not mean a striving for cultural or technological build up. No wonder Liberia was to be described later in the twentieth century as an "intellectual desert."³⁷

Taking the above arguments into consideration, it could be reasonably concluded that these religious norms, which were conveyed to Liberia first and many times over by the ACS, had an enormous impact on education, social behavior, and the way the Liberian elite viewed their society. This represented a success for the "civilizing mission" of the ACS, but those same religious values also had an extremely negative impact on Liberia. They were among the obstacles to the overall meaningful development of that country. In this sense, the "civilizing mission," which was among the objectives the ACS had hoped to accomplish on the West African coast, was ironically undermined by that movement.

FOOTNOTES

¹With no doubt, the settlers' family structures, forms, kinship, solidarity to each other, and their African physical and social environments affected their social manifestations in Liberia. Tom Shick has treated this aspect of Liberian society in his Behold the Promised Land: A History of the Afro-American Settler Society in Nineteenth Century Liberia (Baltimore, 1980). See especially his Chapters Three, Four and Five. Nevertheless, the various religious and social values inherent in the ACS and the ones approved by that movement were the main determinants of Liberia's outward social behavior. See my "American Colonization Society and the Formation of Political, Economic, and Religious Institutions in Liberia, 1822-1900," Ph.D. Dissertation West Virginia University (Morgantown, 1985) for the detail of this argument.

²Harry Johnston, Liberia, Vol. II (New York, 1905) pp. 353-354.

³ibid., p. 376.

⁴ibid., pp. 375-376.

⁵ibid., p. 374.

THE AMERICAN COLONIZATION SOCIETY

⁶Ibid., pp. 374-376. Reverend Scott was under the control of Bishop J. C. Harzert who supervised nearly all American missionary works between the coastal area of Liberia and Angola. His leadership was later extended to include Rhodesia and Mozambique. He was mainly stationed in the United States.

⁷Johnston, Liberia, p. 376.

⁸Henry J. Drewal, "Methodist Education in Liberia, 1833-1856," in Vincent M. Battle and Charles H. Lyons, eds., Essays in the History of African Education (New York, 1970), p. 33.

⁹Cited in Ibid., p. 47. See also the Africa's Luminary (1837), p. 27.

¹⁰Cited in Drewal, "Methodist Education in Liberia, 1833-1856," pp. 33-34.

¹¹Johnston, Liberia, p. 389.

¹²For details of this argument, see Chapters I and V in my "American Colonization Society."

¹³Ashmun to the ACS, May 20, 1827 in Ralph R. Gurley's Life of Jehudi Ashmun, Appendix, (Washington, D.C.), p. 36.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 38.

¹⁵African Repository, XXIV (1848), p. 125.

¹⁶Ibid., XXXII (1856), pp. 200, 203.

¹⁷Ibid., XXXVIII (1862), p. 98.

¹⁸Ibid., XL (1864), p. 108.

¹⁹Presidential Address, (Monrovia, 1866).

²⁰African Repository, XLVI (1870), p. 106.

²¹Johnston, Liberia, p. 358.

²²It must be pointed out, however, that some of these letters were written in such ways as to get material aid from the former masters of those who wrote.

²³Matilda Lomax, from Monrovia, September 26, 1853 to John H. Cocke, deposit Cocke Papers, quoted in Bell I. Wiley, ed., Slave No More, 1833-1869 (Lexington, 1980) p. 78.

AMOS J. BEYAN

24Ibid.

25Robert L. Sterdivant, from Monrovia, August 14, 1857, to Salley C. Brent, deposit, Cocke Papers, quoted in Ibid., pp. 83-84.

26James P. Skipwith, from Monrovia, August 20, 1859, to John H. Cocke, deposit, Cocke Papers, quoted in Ibid., p. 93.

27Washington W. McDonogh, from King Will's Town, October 7, 1846, to John McDonogh, deposit, McDonogh Papers, quoted in Ibid., pp. 141-142.

28A. Jackson, from Monrovia, November 11, 1846, to John McDonogh, deposit, McDonogh Papers, quoted in Ibid., pp. 143-144.

29For the details, see Ibid., and Randall M. Miller, ed. Dear Masters: Letters of a Slave Family (Ithaca), 1976).

30Johnston, Liberia, p. 390.

31See Merran Fraenkel, Tribe and Class in Monrovia (London, 1964) for this view.

32W. V. S. Tubman, who became Liberia's President in 1944, succeeded in enlarging the indigenous "civilized Liberian community." This was mainly carried out to create an alternative political base. Such a strategy was essential for Tubman's political survival, for he was not from Monrovia, the main center of power in Liberia. Despite this, Tubman was careful not to undermine the immigrant Liberian elite class to which he also belonged. This explained why the indigenous Liberians who were accepted as "civilized" and were politically, economically, and socially rewarded for this, were not allowed to challenge the class supremacy of the immigrant Liberians. Those who attempted to do so, or had the potential for doing so, were expelled and punished. For the details of this argument, see the following works: Stephen Hlophe, Class Ethnicity, and Politics in Liberia: A Class Analysis of Power Struggles in Tubman and Tolbert Administrations from 1944-1975, (Washington, 1979); Anthony J. Nimley, The Liberian Bureaucracy: An Analysis and Evaluation of the Environment, Structure and Function (Washington, 1977); Frankel, Tribe and Class in Monrovia; Gus Liebnow, Liberia: The Evolution of Privilege; and Martin Lowenkopf, Politics in Liberia: The Conservative Road to Development (Stanford, 1976).

33Ibid.

34Ibid.

THE AMERICAN COLONIZATION SOCIETY

³⁵This statement was made by President W. R. Tolbert a few days after the rice riot in Monrovia that almost overthrew him in April, 1979. For details of this emphasis, see Joseph E. Holloway's Liberian Diplomacy in Africa: A Study in Inter-African Relations (Washington, 1981), pp. 153-178.

³⁶This definition is based on Scott Nearing's Beyond: Civilization and Learning from History (Harborside, 1975), pp. XII-XIV.

³⁷Richard West, Back to Africa: A History of Sierra Leone and Liberia, (New York, 1970), p. 327.

VAI OCCUPATIONAL CONTINUITIES: TRADITIONAL TO MODERN

Svend E. Holsoe

Introduction

This article focuses upon the Vai people who live in the western coastal region of Liberia, and it examines their traditional categories of work. It then demonstrates the continuity between the traditional occupations and those that the Vai chose to pursue in the modern urban areas. This topic of urbanization has not received very much attention in the literature.

Certainly many scholars have explored such phenomena as the consequences of population shifts from rural to urban settings, and they have examined the adaptations which these populations have made. They have also observed the on-going continuity of linkages which have been maintained between kinsmen in the urban areas and their kinsmen who remained behind in the traditional rural setting. The aspirations of the participants in these migrations have also been explored, along with the nature of new roles which neo-urbanites play in relation both to the social structure of their traditional societies, and what was thought to be the expected behavior appropriate for their new positions.¹

Kenneth Little considers that in the urbanization process adaptation inevitably proceeds through the modification of traditional institutions and their combination with Western cultural values, technology, and economic practices into a new social structure. The fresh functional relations involved are made possible by the restructuring of traditional roles and by the development of roles derived from the encompassing industrial system. Voluntary associations are one of the mechanisms, Little points out, which assists in this restructuring (1965:85). W. B. Schwab has argued that although a common value system may develop among urbanites, "the movement of people back and forth from reserve to town and between towns . . . retards the formation and acceptance of common values system(s) appropriate to urban "life" (1961:132).

But the problem which concerns us here is viewed from another perspective, why do particular ethnic groups select particular occupations in the urban setting? Only a few scholars have addressed this question. Among them is Peter Lloyd, who notes--all too briefly--that,

Some ethnic groups seem to prefer certain types of work. Thus in Lagos in 1950 a similar proportion of Yoruba and Ibo in the city were clerks, but the proportion of Ibo policemen was over eight times as great as that of Yoruba, and most of those employed in domestic service were Ibo and Edo (1968:120-121).

Lloyd suggests some of the multitude of reasons why such ethnic occupational selectivity may have occurred. A particular group's contiguity to centers of employment may cause a higher proportion of skilled and

SVEND E. HOLSOE

semi-skilled workers among that particular group; variation in education depending on where government or mission schools were placed; or members of a single area or locality may corner a particular market, or economic niche (1968:120-121).

Similarly Michael Banton has pointed out for Freetown, that he found unemployment higher among a particular group, the Limba, than among other groups. He goes on to explain "that [it] may be because as labourers they are often employed for a particular contract and have to seek another job when this comes to an end." In addition, he states, that "hardly any Mende or Lima engage in trading, which . . . is primarily in the hands of Temne and Fula. Proportionately more of the Mende than the other tribes are engaged in an occupation requiring some skill . . ." (1957:131). Finally, as an example from Liberia, Jeanette Carter (1970:145) found that 26 percent of the Loma men from one interior town were in the army, forming the largest single occupational category for these men.

Johnetta Cole has added an interesting corollary, that because a stereotype develops about the occupational skills of a particular ethnic group, it becomes reinforced, and as a consequence there should be no surprise to find the particular group liberally represented in those positions which draw on the preconceived skills (1967:177).

Although there can be no denying that some, or all, of these factors may actually occur in providing occupational opportunities for certain ethnic groups, the particular group's own views on, and categories of, types of work seems to have been overlooked. This article sets out to understand how the Vai people viewed various occupations and categorized these tasks as either acceptable for individuals of high status, or as occupations which could only be done by individuals of low status. In addition, this analysis will demonstrate how the Vai people have been able to maintain traditional concepts of "proper" and "improper" types of work, while transforming traditional occupations into jobs which are economically suitable for the modern urban setting. Finally, this study explains why Vai peoples' occupational skills and activities have tended to be stereotypically perceived by other peoples in Liberia in a derogatory manner.

Traditional and Modern Vai Occupations

The Vai were a stratified society with considerable social distance between the freeborn and their slaves, and this fact had considerable impact upon traditional occupational activities. With a large servile class--some estimates have been as high as 75 percent (Holsoe 1977)--as well as the outside economic resources from Europeans, the Vai were able to either raise a steady food supply by themselves through the use of slaves, or else supplement it through purchase from neighboring groups. With food production largely maintained by slaves, many free-born Vai were able to engage in a variety of intellectual, artistic and craft specializations. Of course, a considerable number of individuals pursued careers in politics, war and trade, and many also engaged in hunting and trapping, but usually not as full-time

VAI OCCUPATIONAL CONTINUITIES

occupations.

Traditional Vai Occupations

Traditionally political activities were carried on by members of particular lineages who had acquired that right by first occupation of a territory, or in the case of cross clan confederations, by political astuteness, military might, economic superiority, or a combination of the three (cf. Holsoe, 1974a). Trading was a major activity for many males as well, particularly those who acted as middlemen between the Europeans who arrived along the coast and the interior peoples. The contacts with those who acted as middlemen between the Europeans who arrived along the coast and the interior peoples. The contacts with these outside economic resources were an important base for the traditional social structure. In addition, it meant that the Vai were subjected to new ideas foreign to them and their surrounding African neighbors, and as with any maritime locality, it allowed for an enrichment of patterns of cultural and intellectual creativity. For instance, Vai traders, although often already multi-lingual in African languages, also learned a variety of European ones. More importantly, some Vai men were taken to Europe to see and learn about the outside world, presumably so they would be more loyal to their particular European sponsor upon returning to trade along the Vai coast.

These contacts stimulated intellectual curiosity and experimentation. Although such activities are obviously difficult to document, it is possible to give a few examples of them in the preoccupations of Vai individuals during the nineteenth century. There were, for instance, some individuals who flirted with Islam and the new demands which it made on intellectual reorientation and daily activities (Holsoe 1974b). More importantly, the establishment of a syllabic script particularly suited to the phonemic structure of the Vai language was a major intellectual accomplishment (Holsoe 1971). Thus, the world of ideas excited the Vai, and they experimented.

In traditional Vai Society, there was also a considerable number of people who engaged in a wide variety of craft occupations. Not unlike many other societies in West Africa, blacksmithing was a most important and specialized profession. In traditional Vai society, blacksmithing was limited to particular lineages, and even then only older men were actually allowed to do the smelting and forging. This work became a full-time profession in return for which the townsmen's slaves made farms for the blacksmith, who could demand any item which he felt was necessary for his survival. In addition, women were often presented to the blacksmith and by thus establishing kinship lineages, they provided the giver special access to the blacksmith's products, as well as, assuring better protection against evil forces, which blacksmiths were able to control, especially since they were important participants in the men's Poro and women's Sande societies (cf. d'Azevedo 1980).

Corollary skills to blacksmithing were the occupations of goldsmiths, silversmiths, and of individuals who worked copper, brass and aluminum. These activities were not restricted to particular lineages, but open to anyone with

SVEND E. HOLSOE

the necessary skills. Jewelry was prized among the Vai, and the output was of a high standard. Large varieties of objects were made by these craftsmen, whether for special occasions as when the girls returned from the Sande society and wore particularly fine objects in their hair and around their necks, or just as items of affection given by one individual to another.

Wood carving was well developed among the Vai and was apparently an occupation open to anyone who desired to pursue it. In the past there was a large number of household utensils which were locally made from wood, such as bowls, plates, spoons, mortars and pestles. In addition, there was a fine tradition of carving game boards--the so-called warri--(gambling was a great pastime and large amounts of goods were won and lost). Masks used by the Sande society and other groups were also produced. Individuals were commissioned to do a carving and supported while carrying out the work, as well as, receiving a variety of goods upon completion of the task. Finally, there were also carvers of ivory and bone, often the same individuals who were wood carvers, made musical instruments and personal objects such as bracelets and rings.

Leather work done only by males existed among Vai, but it is difficult to discern from the literature and informants whether this was a traditional Vai occupation, or one which was mainly associated with the Manding traders from the northeast. There is no doubt that there were many leather objects to be found among the Vai, such as bags, sheaths for swords and knives to name a few. Slippers and shoes also were made locally. Since there were limited numbers of cattle, other types of leather must have been used. Attention also should be drawn to the desire for the preservation of certain skins, that of the leopard being most prized. Presumably the tanning was done by the servants, but the actual leather work was carried out by the free-born Vai.

Weaving and plaiting were also popular activities and open to any free-born Vai person. They were organized along sex lines. The plaiting of nets was traditionally a woman's occupation, as the women were the ones who usually fished with them in the streams. However, along Lake Pisu men would plait seine nets, which they themselves used from canoes. The plaiting of rope and making of baskets and mats, along with fibre bags were practices done by both men and women, depending on the particular object. Although anyone could perform these tasks, particular individuals were recognized as especially skillful.

Cloth weaving was traditionally an important occupation. The women combed and spun the thread made from cotton. They also dyed the thread, using either kola nut juice for a brown color or indigo to stain the thread blue. Once these tasks were completed, men wove the thread on narrow looms, the strips of cloth produced being later sewn together. The large variety of designs were one of the distinguishing characteristics of a good weaver. These same individuals would also fashion and sew their cloth into garments, both for daily use, but more particularly for special occasions.

Pottery was traditionally widespread among the Vai and this occupation was the pursuit of women only. A large variety of products were made, usually

VAI OCCUPATIONAL CONTINUITIES

for household purposes, such as bowls, cooking pots, and jugs for the storage and cooling of water. A variety of sexual and social prohibitions were attached to the manufacture of these goods, but any young woman who cared to learn was permitted to do so.

Finally, there were professional musicians, singers, and dancers who displayed their skills in the Vai country. Both men and women could pursue these activities, though there was a tendency for more women than men to be dancers. It is hard to say that these were full-time professions, but apparently skilled musicians and dancers could find work for the greater part of the year. They would not only appear at public festivals, such as a child-naming ceremony, a marriage, the installation of a new chief, or funeral, but they were also hired, particularly the women, to teach the young girls in the Sande society. In addition, an important political personage such as a chief had a group of musicians attached to him who travelled with him as he moved around the country, singing his praises as he entered and left towns.

As can be seen by this short outline, there were a large variety of skills which were practiced in the Vai country, and many of the crafts were full-time occupations. These tasks, however, were limited only to free-born Vai. There were, nevertheless, many tasks which no free-born Vai could consider undertaking, unless in extreme straits. In this case his social position would have fallen so badly that he would be treated by other free-born Vai with disdain. There were, as a result, specific types of work which only servants did. In the main, they were the hard physical tasks. It was they who were the hewers of wood and drawers of water. They carried out the building construction, but under supervision of free-born men. They did the farm work and collected the palm kernels, coffee and cacao beans. Servants were also the bearers of trade goods--there being no beasts of burden--and the rowers of canoes. In other words, all the menial tasks were left to slaves.

There was one household task, however, which was not in the hands of servants--the preparation of food. Since servants were thought to be unclean, they were not allowed to touch a free-born person, nor his food. There was, of course, always the fear that a slave might poison the food. Thus, these tasks were left to the wife or wives of the household. There were always a large number of small children, boys and girls, who could assist. More importantly, if there were several wives, the head wife became the manager of the whole household, directing the various other wives in their activities as well as seeing that the children did their tasks. This was an important job as an ill-managed household must have been a difficult one to live in.

Given the nature of the Vai society with its social stratification, its trading contacts with European traders and interior peoples, and its economic wealth, it is possible to see in traditional Vai society some of the phenomena that are found in a modern urban setting. There were permanently established towns which acted as political, economic and religious centers. These were mainly inhabited by free-born Vai, and it was in these towns that the various craftsmen were located. There were, of course, large numbers of villages, but

SVEND E. HOLSOE

their orientation was toward horticultural production, and most of these were inhabited by slaves. In addition, these villages were impermanent, being moved as the horticultural demands on the surrounding land forced relocation. As a consequence, due to the nature of Vai settlement patterns, when the forces of "modernity" "hit" the Vai country, they had no major disorientating effect. Many of the "new" demands upon the society were known, as the Vai had long been subjected and responsive to outside influences and stimuli. When the pressures developed in the Vai country for movement toward the coastal Liberian settler urban centers,² the Vai were already well prepared.

Transition to the Modern Urban Setting

The reasons for the movement, particularly to Monrovia, the capital of Liberia, were many. Some of the migrants were students who were attracted to, or were selected by their parents to be educated in "Western" schools. Others fled due to warfare, part of the Vai country being ravaged by outside forces three times in thirty years. There is mention, for instance, of a Vai town opposite Monrovia on Bushrod Island as early as 1879 (Buettikofer 1890: I, 39). However, the main exodus did not occur until after 1930, when internal slavery was abolished by an executive order of the President of Liberia. Due to this governmental action, one of the most important economic bases of Vai society, its horticultural production maintained by servile labor, was destroyed, and as a consequence, a way of life in the countryside was swept away. Thus, many Vai, who preferred the type of urban living which they had enjoyed traditionally and would or could not consider horticultural labor, saw an opportunity to perpetuate their way of life in Monrovia. With determination, they used a variety of methods to adapt themselves to their new environment.

However, as noted above, the migration toward the city had begun well before 1930. During the latter part of the nineteenth century Vai people were weighing the degree to which they should involve themselves with the settler society. Although originally there was some hesitation on the part of the free-born parents to have their children educated by the black American missionaries who came to the Vai country--they were, after all, descendants of slaves, possibly including some of those the Vai themselves had exported, in time, a few Vai political leaders and traders realized the value of Western education for their children at the nearby settlement schools. With the advent of the Episcopal Mission at Robertsport in the Vai country during the last half of the 1870's, the pace increased. The most prominent of these children was Momolu Massaquoi, who attracted the attention of Bishop C. C. Penick. As a consequence, Massaquoi was taken to the United States to further his education. Other Vai also were sent to the States, for instance, Thomas Hale Roberts and Thomas E. Besolow. These men were to play prominent roles in the national government and settler communities. Massaquoi eventually joined the Interior Department where he subsequently rose to the position of Commissioner-General and helped write the first legislation for governing the Liberian hinterland (Smyke 1972; Kaafa 1972). The offices of town chiefs, clan chiefs, and paramount chiefs sanctioned by the central government within each ethnic group were based on the traditional political structure of the Vai and neighboring Gola people, with which Massaquoi was most familiar. At a

VAI OCCUPATIONAL CONTINUITIES

later date, this government-imposed structure would create considerable confusion in southeastern Liberia where the traditional political systems did not conform to such a political system (Fraenkel 1966:162). However, the Vai had entered the door of the national government administration, and in that aspect of the government which affected them most directly. Surely a wise as well as a shrewd move.

Other Vai, such as Besolow, would eventually rise to the position of Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, and Thomas Hale Roberts was destined for a great career as an educator; but it was, unfortunately, cut short by an early death. However, in a few brief years, he acted as secretary to the United States Minister Resident in Liberia, and founded the Presbyterian Church in Brewerville and a Presbyterian Mission in the Vai country at Ngima. There were others who could also be mentioned, though they may be less well known. For instance, many Vai men became court clerks and office employees for the government in various locations throughout Liberia (Cole 1967: 103, 177). The names of the individuals are not important here, but, rather the fact that both in politics as well as in intellectual pursuits, the Vai followed occupations which were traditionally legitimate within the context of Vai society. However, it is not the intention to focus on these areas of pursuit, important though they are, but rather to look at the majority of the Vai and how they fit into the economic fabric of a city like Monrovia, for it was mainly this group of people who were most affected by the 1930 governmental decree.

By the second decade of this century, the role of blacksmiths had begun to decline at least to the extent that they stopped quarrying and smelting their own iron. It was easier, and cheaper in man-hours expended, to purchase iron bars from the European traders in exchange for some locally-raised product. As a consequence, blacksmiths began to lose some of their spiritual power, which was coupled with the diminution of the power of the Poro itself, due to the increased involvement of the central government in the political affairs of the Vai. Thus, increasingly, individuals no longer saw the position as particularly prestigious, and it was not possible for any free-born individual who was interested in the profession to become a blacksmith. In addition, many people now considered it hard physical labor with little social prestige attached to it. Those individuals who did not remain in this occupation, found something less strenuous, though there were some who saw opportunities for their skills in the now urban setting, and many of them became mechanics, but usually in a supervisory position.

Blacksmithing had, as previously noted, its correlate in goldsmithing and silversmithing. These craftsmen continued to flourish in the countryside, but individuals found that they could be more successful if they had a larger number of customers. An urban center like Monrovia suited them perfectly. Gold and silver jewelry was in high demand in the city by individuals who used these items as a public display of their prosperity.

Woodcarvers were able to transplant themselves to the cities as well; however, their artistic talents were not sustained to the same degree as the gold and silversmiths. There was no longer any particular demand for wooden

SVEND E. HOLSOE

bowls, plates and spoons, and the masks, which had traditionally been commissioned by the Sande societies, were now carved for the tourist market, but seemed to lack "soul". However, as carpenters, they were able to flourish. Certainly there had been some carpenters who had done work for the wealthy in traditional Vai society; but, in the urban setting, they were able to find a larger number of customers who needed their skills, not only in construction, but in the manufacture of furniture. Their skilled joinery, which was most noticeable in doorways and windows in the Vai country, now could be put to good use in the urban setting.

In a similar fashion, leatherworkers of the past, now found new occupations establishing shoe repair businesses. Fancy leather work, such as sword sheaths, bags and sandals, which in the past were in demand in the countryside, were no longer of great interest in the city. The imported fashions from Europe and America were too much competition. However, these items, which were expensive but necessary prerequisites of "civilized" life, were not easily discarded, and thus had to be repaired, sometimes many times over, and the Vai craftsmen were there to do it.

Traditional plaiting of bags and mats, which had been useful items in traditional Vai society, were not particularly successful trade items in the urban area. A few expatriates might buy them, and they could be found on the Monrovia market as late as the early 1950's, but demand was not great, and the craft seems to have died out. Likewise, although handwoven country-cloths are still prized items, the craft is dying in the face of cheap foreign cloth. Those cloths which continue to be handwoven usually are made with foreign thread, rather than locally-spun cotton.

However, beginning in the 1960's, old dying techniques, particularly those used traditionally by women with the locally-spun cotton, were transferred to techniques of tie-dying and batiking of imported cloths. Many Vai women, and the occupation is limited to women only, have become prosperous from the work. Again, a traditional skill was adapted to meet a new demand.

The vast majority of men, who traditionally were weavers, turned to tailoring as an occupation in the city. They had, of course, done some tailoring in the countryside; but now the repertoire of clothes requested was much larger. The occupation was an honorable one in the traditional complex of free-born Vai occupations and thus acceptable for males to pursue. Until the influx of Mandingo tailors from Guinea, most tailors found in Monrovia were Vai.

Although urban dwellers are interested in "new" music, traditional forms have remained strong. Consequently, musicians, singers and dancers from the traditional society continue to be important occupations, especially since their services for celebrating the births of children, marriages, and funerals are still in strong demand. In addition, requests by government officials for "traditional" performances at state occasions also help to sustain these occupations. Thus, the activities of musicians, singers and dancers know no boundary, practicing in the city as well as in the countryside.

VAI OCCUPATIONAL CONTINUITIES

There have been, of course, adaptations to the city which have more tenuous connections to traditional occupations. Today, there is a demand for masons. In the past, the Vai built their houses with poles, using wattle and daub techniques. Masonry is, of course, difficult and hard work; but the aim which a Vai had on entering such a profession was not to remain at the level of a common mason. As one Vai man put it, "If you are under somebody, then you can tote load, but, you controlling somebody, then no need of you toting load." And he went on to explain (in Liberian English) why he pursued his apprenticeship as far as he could.

If I am learning, . . . so I must just have to tote load, but now, when I become a mason, I drop that, that is why I didn't even learn half way, I learn plan and all, so I won't be under somebody to say, give me mortar, give me block, bring sand up. That is the reason why we Vai, whenever we go learn anything, we want to learn it good, so that we will not always be having two or three bossman (Kiahon 1975).

Though some Vai chauvinism is evident, it was clear, given that he was a free-born Vai, that in order to maintain his position of respectability in the context of Vai occupational values, he should be a leader of laborers, not a laborer himself.

In recent years, the trading skills which the Vai had developed over many centuries, found a new form in the modern setting. Today, one of the outlets for such men is as drivers of their own trucks. The driver, as a businessman, has control over the flow of trade goods, seeing to it that those goods move from one point to another. In a sense, they continue their middlemen role, as they had traditionally done, between the farmer in the countryside and the markets, now in Monrovia instead of on the beach, as in the past. The role is similar, and their prestige remains high in the eyes of their fellow Vai.

There is one other interesting area of adaptation, which might not have been initially expected, at least not as specifically Vai. As managers of large households, Vai head-wives learned more administrative skills. This situation was not peculiar to the Vai, other ethnic groups also practiced polygyny. However, there was apparently a special combination of circumstances which made the Vai successful. Vai women began to open restaurants--locally known as cook-shops--in the city. They were successful, as they combined their previous experience in managing the preparation of food for large numbers of people with a type of cooking which is particularly esteemed by Liberians in general. Vai cooking is not particularly spicy--this is not to say that peppers are not used--but, it is somewhat plainer cooking than that done by some other groups in Liberia, who make great use of palm oil in all their foods. As one Vai restaurateur (he ran the restaurant jointly with his wife) put it, "I can say in all Liberia, people don't refuse our food, because they always feel that our food is decently cooked" (Kiahon 1975). In addition, it was pointed out that many cook-shops which say they are Vai, in fact, may be run by other ethnic groups, but when people see the sign Vai Cook Shop, they will eat there. What this says about their customers' discriminating taste is another question.

SVEND E. HOLSOE

There are, then, a large number of occupations which the Vai free-born individuals easily pursued in the urban setting. But they are equally adamant about the types of jobs which they could not occupy. Clearly any task which was unpleasant, in which they had to be under the authority of another or which involved hard physical labor were not tasks which they would readily accept. In response to a question about the Vai working as a laborer at the Port of Monrovia, a typical Vai response was, "uh, that is one of the work, you can't see a Vai man doing it. . . . You will never find him toting load, or loading cars. We take it to be cheap work. Messenger, washerman, a Vai man don't count that. We aren't taking it to be a good work for any intelligent person" (Kiahon 1975). These are clearly tasks which traditionally would have been carried out by Vai slaves; and, as a consequence, no self-respecting Vai would deign to do such things.

Because of these attitudes, the Vai people have been given a variety of labels by others in Liberia. For instance, it is said in a derogatory manner, that "The Vai people too smart, they know too much book" (Cole 1967:176). In response to why Vai people are considered lazy, a Vai man said,

"If they see you toting, toting a bag of rice, throwing it in a car, then they say, you are strong, but . . . we don't do this. In fact, we don't like it. And they say, we like easy work, because Vai man like to just be behind a machine sewing cloth, being in the office, or goldsmith. They don't want work that they will tote load. This is the reason why they say we lazy" (Kiahon 1975).

However, if one comes from a traditional society which esteemed intellectual pursuits, business acumen, self employment and managerial roles, it is not difficult to understand why Vai can be found in urban economic niches which permitted these esteemed characteristics to persist.

Conclusions

Not unlike many other peoples, the Vai found the large urban center, in this case Monrovia, attractive and from at least the latter half of the nineteenth century began to settle in numbers near the city. However, it was the government decree of 1930 which affected Vai society most dramatically. Having been a society in which horticultural production was maintained by a large servile class, this economic base was undermined by the abolition of slavery. Free-born Vai, who had traditionally only considered politics, trade or crafts as proper activities for their status, were forced to make a decision. Either they had to give up their traditional occupations, which were in a sense symbolic of their rank, and become farmers or otherwise try to perpetuate their traditional concepts of what was a "proper" occupation. Many chose the latter course, which meant that they had to make a shift to an urban center where they could earn a sufficient amount to support themselves. However, for those who chose to migrate, the capital of Liberia, Monrovia, was not disorienting and difficult. Either individuals continued to pursue the occupations they had known from the countryside, or else they remolded their

VAI OCCUPATIONAL CONTINUITIES

traditional skills to take advantage of new opportunities. They, however, maintained the traditional Vai categories of what was "proper" and "improper" work in the new setting. There was a logic and rationale to their actions and the fact that Vai hold particular types of positions in the urban setting should not surprise anyone who understands traditional Vai categories of labor.

In addition, it is fairly clear that the process of urbanization for the Vai has not been particularly stressful as has been the experience of many other peoples, who have been described by scholars. Nor did the fact that the Vai maintained contact with their countryside, moving back and forth, retard their acceptance of a value system appropriate to urban life, as Schwab (1961) has noted elsewhere. The Vai did not find the need to restructure traditional roles, as pointed out by Little (1965). In fact, Vai traditional occupational roles were admirably suited to their new environment.

It is hoped this article provides a useful new dimension to the study of urbanization. We must understand a peoples' past to understand their present circumstances and to plan for their future. Development planners must take heed and not establish projects in areas where the tasks demanded are inappropriate to the peoples' attitudes toward "proper" and "improper" occupations.

NOTES

This article in an earlier form was presented as a paper at the African Studies Association Meeting, San Francisco, October 31, 1975. I am grateful to Daniel P. Biebuyck for a careful reading of this article and for helpful comments.

1For a summary of some of these themes see Southall (1961:1-30).

2These were town founded by returned Afro-Americans during the nineteenth century.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Banton, Michael. 1957. West African City, A Study of Tribal in Freetown. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Buettikofer, Johann. 1890. Reisebilder Aus Liberia. Leiden: Brill. 2 vols.
- Carter, Jeanette E. 1970. "The Rural Loma and Monrovia: Ties with an Urban Center," Liberian Studies Journal, II, no. 2, 143-152.
- Cole, Johnetta B. 1967. "Tribal and Wage-Earning Labor Among Tribal Liberians." Ph.D. Dissertation, Anthropology, Northwestern University.

SVEND E. HOLSOE

- d'Azevedo, Warren L. 1980. "Gola Poro and Sande: Primal Tasks in Social Custodianship," Ethnologische Zeitschrift Zuerich, VIII.
- Fraenkel, Merran. 1966. "Social Change on the Kru Coast of Liberia," Africa, XXVI, 154-172.
- Holsoe, Svend E. 1971. "A Case of Stimulus Diffusion? (A Note on Possible Connections between the Vai and Cherokee Scripts)," Language Sciences, No. 15, 22-24.
- _____. 1974a. "The Manipulation of Traditional Political Structures in Western Liberia during the Nineteenth Century," Ethnohistory, XXI, 158-167.
- _____. 1974b. "The Dynamics of Vai Culture and Islam," a Paper presented at the Department of Anthropology Faculty Colloquium, University of Delaware, November 25th.
- _____. 1977. "Slavery and Economic Response among the Vai (Liberia and Sierra Leone)," in: S. Miers & I. Kopytoff, eds. Slavery In Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives. Madison. 287-303.
- Kaafa. 1972. Article, Kaafa: Bulletin of the Society of Liberian Authors, II, no. 2 (July-Dec.), 1-11.
- Kiahon, Sando. 1975. Mason and restaurant owner, Bendu, Gawula Chiefdom, at Monrovia. Interview, August 17, 1975. Tape no. 35/1/1.
- Little, Kenneth. 1965. West African Urbanization. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lloyd, Peter C. 1968. Africa in Social Change: West African Societies in Transition. New York: Praeger.
- Schwab, William B. 1961. "Social Stratification in Gwelo," in: A. W. Southall, ed. Social Change in Modern Africa. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 126-144.
- Smyke, Raymond J. 1972. "Manding Biography: The Massaquois of Liberia," Paper read at the Manding Conference, London.

AMERICAN DISTRICT COMMISSIONERS ON THE LIBERIAN FRONTIER

Dalvan M. Coger

The financial situation of the Liberian government, always precarious, reached crisis proportions in 1908. The United States, after consultation with Britain, France and Germany, established a customs receivership that made Liberia a virtual protectorate of the great New York banking house of Kuhn, Loeb and Company. This arrangement provided an honest administration of the Customs Service, though an inefficient and expensive one, since each major power provided one supervisor of customs.

Concurrent with the reorganization of the customs service, the Liberian military, termed the "Frontier Force", was reorganized and retrained under the direction of Colonel Charles Young, the United States Military Attache in Monrovia. Assisting Young were a number of black American officers, men that Young had soldiered with in the United States Army.¹ Their success in Liberia led to the recruitment in the United States of other specialists; men that the country desperately needed, but could ill afford.

This situation, in which the Liberians had to some extent lost control of their own affairs, infuriated many of the local politicians. While these were the same politicians that had initially importuned the United States to save Liberia from British and French aggression, they quite naturally feared that their positions were endangered.

The political power in Liberia was a monopoly of the "national bourgeoisie", a westernized group of perhaps nine thousand descendants of early settlers.² They were led by approximately two hundred elected or appointed officials. Under severe pressure to find patronage jobs, and to protect the privileges of the group, these officials were dominated by the President and his cabinet.

The settlers were, for all practical purposes, the Liberians. There were, in addition, some 60,000 "civilized" Liberians in the coastal area, and something over a million Africans still living under their own chiefs in the interior, but neither of these latter groups could exercise any political influence.³

The settlers were not economically productive. Colonel Young thought that as many as half of the group lived by courtesy of government revenue.⁴ American missionary societies spent substantial sums, sometimes running to several hundred thousand a year, in Liberia and some of this--as much as 50%--was graft.⁵ Finally, the trade of the country passed through the hands of foreign merchants who employed very few of this group.

DALVAN M. COGER

It was this trade that led to the crisis of 1914. Some 80% of Liberia's exports travelled in German ships. The German trading firms in the coastal area villages generated most of the income of the modern sector of the economy. When the Great War began in 1914, the British and French lost no time in closing down the German operations, but neither country had surplus shipping to fill the needs of Liberia.

The ensuing depression was especially severe for Liberia because of the nature of its society. Virtually everything consumed by the European residents, and by some thousands of the national bourgeoisie, had to be imported. Agricultural development in Liberia was essentially of the subsistence type, though there was plenty of land idle. Most of the rice consumed in the coastal zone, for example, was imported. With no ships coming regularly, prices rose sharply.

As trade decreased, and customs revenue as well, so did the money from related sources--trading licenses for example. The Receivership struggled to make ends meet, and finally was compelled to ask Kuhn, Loeb and Company to accept token payments on the loan. The first requirement, the bankers agreed, should be to keep the Frontier Force paid and fed.

Meanwhile, the Liberian government was also receiving less income. Officials took salary cuts. Cabinet posts were doubled up, and for a time one man covered the three posts of War, Interior, and Education. It was only natural that in seeking a new source of revenue they would turn to the hinterland of Liberia, an empire as yet only partially explored, and in population and resources only vaguely known.

In September, 1915, Richard C. Bundy, the Secretary of the American Legation in Monrovia (and frequently Charge d'Affaires), Colonel Young, and the General Receiver of Customs and Financial Advisor to the Liberian Government, Reed Page Clarke, held a meeting in which they discussed reform. They produced a memorandum in which they quite candidly described their evaluation, and the evaluation of many visiting foreigners, of the Liberian administration. Further, they read this statement to President Howard and his assembled cabinet. Along with other reforms, it addressed itself to the administration of the interior:

Commissions of commissioners and civil officials in native districts should be suspended or revoked. The intention is to get rid of a horde of inefficient, dishonest trouble-makers at one stroke. There is not valid reason why ninety percent of them were ever commissioned in the first place. They are simply a set of unscrupulous parasites.⁶

The President accepted the criticism with good grace and Colonel Young subsequently drafted a new plan for administering the interior. Other plans were developed by the Liberian Secretary of the Interior, and by H. F. Worley, the successor to Clarke as General Receiver.

AMERICAN DISTRICT COMMISSIONERS ON THE LIBERIAN FRONTIER

Fiscal necessity led to the enactment by the Liberian legislature in 1916 of a hut tax which was to be collected, for the first time, in the interior. The administration of much of the interior had been haphazard, but now as Monrovia considered the potential of the area, they saw that it had substantial possibilities. Collection would not be without its difficulties, but the Frontier Force was quite accustomed to dealing with recalcitrant tribesmen. The old officials were, of course, still there in the interior.

Later in the war, the State Department announced a War Loan of five million dollars to Liberia. This money was to clear the indebtedness of the country to Kuhn, Loeb and Co., and to settle the government's other debts, as well as to encourage some modest development. More than this, however, the State Department decided to use the loan to pressure the Liberians into making certain reforms. Thus it came about that the U.S. loan to Liberia, fiscal reform, plans to develop the interior, and the recruiting of American administrators--District Commissioners--were closely interrelated.

Mitchell's First Administration

Thomas C. Mitchell, a civil engineer, arrived in Liberia in September, 1916, to work as a surveyor for the Monrovia government on a joint project of the Liberians and French to demarcate the boundary with French Guinea. In December, since the French were preoccupied with their European war, and he had shown himself to be quite capable, Mitchell was made Commissioner General of the Interior.⁷ He sometimes referred to himself in his correspondence, rather grandly, as "Commissioner General, R. L." [Republic of Liberia]

The interior that Mitchell was to administer, as an official of the Liberian government, had a few officials who exercised authority in the villages where they were stationed, and over some adjacent areas. These areas were generally along the frontier of the country and were the consequence of quarrels with the British and French over administration of people that lived on one side of the border and worked or traded on the other. The great bulk of the interior was still under village chiefs who did very much as they pleased. Except on those rare occasions when the situation brought the Frontier Force into their area, the local chiefs very much maintained their autonomy. By contrast with these independent chiefs, those areas under Liberian officials were badly exploited. At times this led to a virtual depopulation of some sections, as whole tribes fled into French or British territory.⁸ It was these officials, and more numerous ones in the coastal area, that Bundy and Young had termed "unscrupulous parasites."

The whole matter of Liberian treatment of the indigenous inhabitants was a scandal and an open secret that was more frequently hinted at than openly discussed by foreign officials and missionaries. In 1908, James L. Sibley, after surveying the educational needs of the country, had noted that "Liberia is divided into free persons, serfs and slaves."⁹ Colonel Young reported in 1915 that "venal commissioners . . . bled the natives unmercifully, not only for the Government but for themselves."¹⁰ Indeed, so notorious was Liberian officialdom that the British Consul at Monrovia informed Bundy in 1918 that

DALVAN M. COGER

"the opinion prevails that Liberia should not be furnished arms and ammunition by the Allied governments for the purpose of enabling the Liberian Government to coerce the natives to pay taxes."11

Mitchell's first period as Commissioner of the Interior, from December, 1916, to May, 1918, was an extremely busy one for him, since he was operating with only the Frontier Force to aid him. He met and discussed mutual problems with the French District Commissioners along the Guinea boundary. On several occasions he followed a get-tough policy which seems to have impressed the Frenchmen, who after all were accustomed to dealing with Liberian officials, for whom they had little respect. Mitchell also spent a great deal of time in "palavers" with tribal leaders, in the process learning the details of Liberian administration, and its shortcomings. Using the Frontier Force to good effect, he followed the traditional pacification tactic of village burning.12 The theory seems to have been that the refugee problem created by burning out a few villages was enough to make a hostile chief re-think his priorities. On one occasion he burned several hostile villages and on another occasion forty-six.13

One problem in developing a good administration in the interior was that of personnel. The American government had long known that the revolts that plagued Monrovia were caused in large part by Liberian officials abusing their authority. In his annual report to the Liberian legislature in 1915, President Howard observed that "some commissioners will persistently misinterpret and abuse their proconsular function."14 Bundy, in one of his dispatches to State, was more explicit:

Liberians capable, and possessing correct ideas of interior administration, are usually unwilling to reside for considerable periods of time in the hinterland. The kind of men ready and anxious to go invariably cause trouble because their chief ambition is to exploit the country and the natives.15

Mitchell's first term as Commissioner closed on an incident that neatly illustrates the administrative difficulties he faced. There were two Liberian commissioners in the interior, technically under Mitchell's supervision, by the name of Howard. The men were not related, nor apparently any near kin of President Howard. In January, 1918, word reached Mitchell on the Guinea frontier that the Golah tribe, out of patience with the Howards' arrogance, were on the verge of a revolt. In an attempt to prevent trouble, Mitchell sent messengers to the Howards, ordering them to report to him. When they ignored his orders and sought to flee to Monrovia, he sent troops who brought them in.16

Lieutenant James B. Howard of the Liberian Frontier Force, was also designated "Commissioner at Large" in the area of the Kongba Golahs, an area approximately one hundred miles north-northeast of Monrovia. Assisting Lt. Howard were Henry Howard, a civilian District Commissioner (and himself a member of one of the interior tribes), and a number of men from the Frontier Force and government messengers.17

AMERICAN DISTRICT COMMISSIONERS ON THE LIBERIAN FRONTIER

Mitchell's charges against the Howards resulted in the Secretary of the Interior, John L. Morris, assembling a group of officials and traveling into the interior to investigate the charges. His party included several prominent Liberians, as well as the Receiver of Customs and the Commander of the Frontier Force, both Americans. Observing the investigation was Major John Green, U.S. Army, Military Attache at Monrovia, Colonel Young's successor. The record of the investigation is especially valuable for the insights it provides into social conditions in the interior. For example, "slavery", in the broadest sense of involuntary servitude, was a thriving institution, as the testimony of one Sergeant indicates:

Upon being questioned by Mr. Twe about how many refugees that Commissioner Henry Howard took from the kambah people, how many there were and how they were divided, Sergeant Coni stated that Commissioner Howard took one small girl named Bayo for himself, gave one woman to Mr. James Robert, gave another woman to Charlie Parson, and the balance he sent to his uncle, old man Varmah at Bumbuma.¹⁸

The records of the investigation provided the best ammunition for those who wanted the U.S. government to demand reform.

At the end of several weeks of hearings, the commission found that Lt. Howard had been guilty of malfeasance in office, misappropriation of government property and funds, smuggling, and highway robbery. It recommended that criminal proceedings be taken against him, and against sixteen of his subordinates as accessories both before and after the fact.¹⁹

While there was a great deal of activity, and perhaps some brief improvement in behavior by officials, some six months later an American official noted that "only two subordinates were fined and \$5,000 transmitted through the Bank of British West Africa by Lt. J. B. Howard was seized as misappropriated funds, but Lt. Howard was returned to duty in the Frontier Force."²⁰ This conclusion of the affair simply confirmed the impression of Liberian justice held by most foreigners--that the system was designed to perpetuate the power of the national bourgeoisie, and was a weapon to be used against outsiders, either tribal Liberians, or Europeans.²¹

Mitchell's Second Administration

Mitchell returned to the United States in June, 1918, with the question of his successor unsettled.²² With the American loan pending, and the Americans demanding reform, there was no question but that the Commissioner of the Interior should be an American. It was also decided that the Commissioner and his assistants should be white men. One reason for preferring whites was given by Mitchell before he left Liberia:

I would recommend that all the American Commissioners be white men, because the natives have been so badly abused by officers in the interior--both American and Liberian--that they have lost all

DALVAN M. COGER

confidence in them, and no matter how competent and efficient a [black] man might be, they will be very suspicious for a long time and his work will be greatly handicapped.²³

Bundy further noted, in a dispatch to State, that "It has been intimated by the Liberian Government that it would prefer to have white American citizens designated for the posts of assistant interior commissioners."²⁴ Part of the answer to this may lie in the disillusionment of the Liberians with black American officers in the Frontier Force. With the exception of the original group selected by Colonel Young, the Americans had scarcely been outstanding.²⁵

The real reason for selecting whites was quite possibly more devious. Bundy included with one of his dispatches to State a memo from C. D. B. King, Liberian Secretary of State, and a man already being considered for the presidency, that said, *inter alia*, "For reasons explained to you in our conversation this morning, it would be preferable to the Liberian Government to have white American citizens designated for the posts of Assistant Commissioners."²⁶ In light of subsequent developments, it is interesting that King did not put in writing his reasons. As President, King was to use the white commissioners as a means of whipping up anti-American feeling. Like his father-in-law, ex-President Barclay, King was always known for his very pro-British, and anti-American, views.²⁷

While his work in the interior had apparently generally pleased the Liberian government, Mitchell would not commit himself to returning to Africa before consulting Washington.²⁸ No doubt he unburdened himself at the State Department, as visitors returning from Liberia regularly did. On June 10, 1918, Bundy telegraphed State that the Liberian government desired the return of Mitchell, and that they preferred white commissioners.²⁹ Mitchell accepted the position. The State Department's reaction to Mitchell is not recorded, but it did send him to the War Department where he eventually recruited a number of assistants with engineering backgrounds from the Insular Service and negotiated the purchase of weapons and ammunition for the Frontier Force.

The American loan was still in the offing at this time. Everyone was working on the assumption that it would be approved by the U. S. government. Under the reforms planned in connection with the loan, a number of American civilians were to be employed by the Liberians. In the case of the commissioners, they were not only to correct abuses in the interior, but were to develop essential new revenues. Thus the recruiting was based on certain assumptions that did not materialize. The loan was not approved, and the Liberian government was consequently stuck with a number of expensive, by their view, employees. Worse, these Americans had counted on their own government backing them in their reform efforts. Once it became apparent that the loan was not likely to materialize, all excuse for reform collapsed, and the Americans were simply a nuisance in a "graft as usual" situation.

AMERICAN DISTRICT COMMISSIONERS ON THE LIBERIAN FRONTIER

Mitchell and several white recruits, along with a cargo of small arms and ammunition, were delivered in Monrovia by the U.S. cruiser Chattanooga on April 19, 1919. One of the recruits with Mitchell was Horace A. Sawyer.³¹

Sawyer was a competent, hard-working man and while Mitchell remained in Monrovia to work on administrative details, he set off for the interior in May, 1919. He planned to operate in roughly the same area as that where Mitchell had been active some two years earlier. On his way to the French frontier, however, complaints about the Liberian District Commissioner at Sanquellie near the Franco-Liberian boundary, one Mr. Sandimannie came to his attention.³² On June 7, 1919, Sawyer wrote the Secretary of the Interior telling him that he was sending him, in Monrovia, seven cows and four "little girls". Both the cattle and "slaves" had been part of the Liberian D.C.'s loot, and Sawyer informed the Secretary that he was going to stop by Sanquellie to check on Sandimannie's activities. The full details of the Liberian's work did not turn up at once, and in a written report to the Secretary in late June, Sawyer more or less exonerated the D.C.³³ Over the following months, however, more information came to his attention, and affairs came to a crisis in the fall of 1920.

The system by which money was raised through trafficking in slaves was uncovered by Sawyer. The slaves came from two sources. During the wars with the tribes of the interior, allies of the government were allowed to take captives who could then be ransomed for \$20 or \$30 each by the defeated chief. While they were awaiting ransom, they worked for their food and could be sold or traded. If the defeated tribe could not raise the ransom, a not unlikely event, the captive's status became permanent.³⁴ The other source of slaves was through the system of pawning. This was an old tribal custom which lent itself to abuse. A head of family, village, or tribe, who needed cash for the payment of taxes or a fine, would pick the least productive, but still marketable member of his group, and pawn that person for cash. The pawn could be redeemed for the original amount--Sawyer found it to be from \$13 to \$20--plus interest that ran from \$5 to \$8.³⁵ If the pawn was not redeemed within a stipulated length of time, it was permissible to sell the pawn to another party. As long as the pawn remained within the tribe, there were the normal pressures against abuse of the system. With the coming of "civilization", however, a pawn might end up far from home, in a completely different tribe, and subject to all manner of abuses.³⁶ The lot of the slave in either case was not enviable since in many tribal societies those from other tribes are considered sub-human.

Commissioner Sandimannie worked through a "cover", one Sherman Coleman, who had served in the Frontier Force. Coleman was advanced money by Sandimannie, who by the nature of his work knew which chiefs were in need of money to meet tax payments, and could, if necessary, squeeze harder by levying a fine for some imaginary offense.³⁷ While there is no direct evidence that the District Commissioner engaged in "fining", it was a common practice. To raise the money, the chiefs pawned youngsters at exorbitant interest rates, and the children, especially young girls, found a ready market on the coast at a neat profit.³⁸

DALVAN M. COGER

Both Sandimannie and his major accomplice in exploiting the area, Captain Harper of the Frontier Force, were "civilized" Liberians. There is more than a hint of perversion in Harper's letters to Sandimannie, addressed to "Dearest Wife", or "My Dear Wife Sandimannie," and in frequent references to needing "a small pesseh [sic] boy or girl."³⁹ The form of address may have been a personal joke, and no doubt the children referred to were to be primarily household servants, but it is not likely that either Sawyer, or the State Department officials who read his reports, interpreted it that way.

While Sawyer went about his regular duties, he documented his case against Sandimannie. One of his finds was a letter from a member of the Liberian hierarchy, a former Secretary of the Interior:

. . . Remember be careful about those other articles. Better you drop that thing anyhow. If you now stop the fellow's eyes will be moved from you. If you will not stop I am afraid you will make it hard to stand by you. Enough is enough and more spoils everything. Simpson on the advice of Mitchell, wanted to go to your town and search for some money which a certain messenger, Robert, says you sent there. I objected to that sort of thing and will not have it . . . I will stand by you. Do not fear. No one will be allowed to go to your town to search, whether the reports be true or not. Of course, I do not believe it. But listen, stop. -----Be nice to Sawyer, he is temporarily with power. Do not antagonize him.⁴⁰

Meanwhile, other white District Commissioners had been recruited, and arrived in Monrovia on December 24, 1919. There were three of these men: Albert W. Longaker of Lansdale, Pennsylvania; James O. Wanzer of Oakland, California; and Percy M. Jones of Omaha, Nebraska.⁴¹ A later addition to their ranks was Lee C. Daves of Albuquerque, New Mexico, who was to undertake survey work on the boundary in the area where Mitchell had been unable to complete his task.⁴²

From the beginning things went badly for the newcomers. They discovered that the \$3,000 a year salary, with a small expense account, which had looked good in the United States, did not suffice for Monrovia where everything was terribly expensive.⁴³ Within the first three months, nearly all of them were ill with fever. Wanzer, who was accompanied by his wife, was desperately ill. His wife was similarly stricken, and since they were both Christian Scientists, they refused medication. When they were unconscious, their friends sent for the local physician who administered medicine, and following their recovery sent Mrs. Wanzer home.⁴⁴ Between illness, the unsettled status of the U.S. loan, and the expenses involved in living in Monrovia, tension developed between the newcomers and the old hands, Mitchell and Worley. Soon there was a steady stream of complaints flowing through the U.S. Minister, Dr. Johnson, and his associate, Mr. Bundy, to the State Department. These were reinforced with letters to their Congressmen, who plagued the State Department with inquiries as to what was going on in Liberia.⁴⁵

AMERICAN DISTRICT COMMISSIONERS ON THE LIBERIAN FRONTIER

The ostensible cause of much of this was the question of exchange rates. The General Receiver insisted on paying them in sterling, the local currency, at an exchange of \$4.80, while the New York rate was \$4.20, or so. Since a record was kept of payment, it should have been sufficient to accept the money under protest, and hope for an adjustment, but Wanzer and others refused to accept their pay at this rate.⁴⁶ A good part of the problem was, no doubt, the character of Mr. Worley, the General Receiver. A fussy man, he was, nonetheless, careless about detail on occasion. Eventually, as the result of an investigation by the commander of the U.S. Chattanooga in June, 1920, he was replaced by a new General Receiver.⁴⁷

Thomas C. Mitchell seems to have been generally disliked by several of the men who worked for him. Worley was convinced that Mitchell was responsible for most of his misfortunes, and wrote letters with elaborate documentation to State claiming that the man was a scoundrel.⁴⁸ Certain it is that Mitchell was quarrelsome, and that he gambled and drank. Some of his subordinates felt that he was tactless and complained that he neglected his duties in sending them supplies. They also felt he was intriguing in Monrovia, either to maintain his position, or to secure the agency for a shipping company if the loan failed.⁴⁹

The delay in granting the loan, which had shaken the faith of the pro-U.S. forces in the country, was the real cause of their difficulties. This long delay had given the new President, C. D. B. King, his opportunity. The wrath of his clique within Liberian officialdom focused on destroying the credibility of Worley, but in open and active hostility to Mitchell. Even Colonel Young, a long-time friend of the country and much admired, found himself isolated.⁵⁰ The commander of the Chattanooga in his secret report noted that "About the first thing I ran up against were complaints about the Financial Advisor, I met them at every turn during the whole course of my visit. . . ." ⁵¹ In Mitchell's case, his effectiveness as an administrator was absolutely destroyed, and he left the country in frustration. Perhaps he saw what was happening and courted destruction. What he did was to bring the issue of slavery to the Department's attention.⁵²

The first of the new commissioners to leave for the interior was Percy Jones, who departed in late February for Zinta, about 150 miles from Monrovia, by way of Sierra Leone. From Freetown he could travel by rail part of the way to his post.⁵³ On March 27, A. W. Longaker traveled to his station at Binda, and J. O. Wanzer took up his position in late April at Sonoyea.⁵⁴

These men, who were without white companions, wrote each other regularly and exchanged gossip about the situation in Monrovia, gossip they sometimes acquired by letter from friends there. Such bits as "Mitchell is sporting around Monrovia in a new Reo automobile, playing tennis and poker . . .," suggest how much they missed America.⁵⁵ Their major work--they were all engineers--was in supervising road building and other construction by the tribesmen who worked on a corvée system. The Americans also supervised tax collection and heard "palavers".⁵⁶ When the Chattanooga arrived in June, Longaker and Wanzer used the excuse of replenishing their food supply to get

DALVAN M. COGER

to talk to the Captain. Longaker, writing of their party to Jones, who couldn't get down from Zinta, gossips of Wanzer, "Jimmy is sure a real person with his better half in the U.S. . . . the boys enjoyed several cocktails on James."57

Wanzer's experience with his subordinate Liberian District Commissioners was apparently typical. He wrote Jones, "Harper . . . announced that he took orders from no white commissioner and that he was supreme in his district. Two other Liberian Commissioners (African) inform me the same . . ."58 Jones laid this problem with the Liberians at Mitchell's door, writing Worley that "the attitude taken by Mr. Mitchell relative to the Liberian officials soon spread to the interior, which you know as well as I caused the entire loss of control by American officials."59

In May, 1920, Mitchell, it appears, decided to have a showdown with the Department of Interior on "the question of authority and functions of the American Commissioner General and his assistant District Commissioners."60 Sawyer, whose investigation of Commissioner Sandimannie had born fruit, was directed by Mitchell to arrest Sandimannie and send him to Monrovia under guard.61 The arrest was made by Captain Nabors, one of the black U.S. officers in the Frontier Force, on the order of Sawyer. Nabors, assisted by Percy Jones, searched Sandimannie's office and quarters and took possession of all of his records. The captive was literally placed in chains and taken under guard to the headquarters in Monrovia, some 12 days march from the place of arrest. The charges made by Mitchell included slave trading, brutality to the "natives", and "appropriating to his personal use revenues in the form of taxes and proceeds from the sale of traders licenses . . . to approximate in the aggregate between five and six thousand dollars."62

Once in Monrovia, Sandimannie was immediately released by the Secretary of the Interior. Mitchell, attending a cabinet meeting on the issue, found the President strongly disapproved of what he had done.63 Sandimannie was, after all, a protégé of former President A. Barclay, who was more than the best lawyer in Liberia, he was the father-in-law of President King.64 King's disapproval solidified the national bourgeoisie behind Sandimannie. The Liberian press picked up the story, emphasizing that Mitchell was a Georgian, and in describing the placing of Sandimannie in chains, said it was "the first instance known since a negro [sic] has received such treatment from the hands of a Southerner from the time of the departure from the home of the latter."65 The same article noted that Mitchell's home town in Georgia was a "place noted for its warning by posters at the corner of each block: 'NIGERS READ AND RUN'."66

A few nights following Sandimannie's release, Mitchell's residence, which he shared with others, was harassed by a drunken Liberian who stood in the middle of the street and "cursed him out". The Commissioner ordered the man to move on and in the ensuing argument was alleged to have hit the man. The Liberian swore out a warrant for Mitchell's arrest and despite the best efforts of Minister Johnson, Mitchell was haled into court and fined \$50. Even worse, the Liberian promptly started a civil suit for \$3,000 damages.67

AMERICAN DISTRICT COMMISSIONERS ON THE LIBERIAN FRONTIER

All during the summer of 1920, the cauldron bubbled merrily. The men in the interior exchanged letters, wondering how long it would take for Captain Kimberley's report to reach Washington, and anticipating an explosion. They even developed a touch of paranoia. "The boys in Monrovia," Wanzer wrote Sawyer and Jones, "have arranged a code sentence to tell us [that the shock waves had hit Monrovia]. It will be written casually in a letter, and when we get that letter with the code, we are to beat it for Monrovia as fast as we can . . . Record somewhere and destroy the quotation below: 'I have broken my watch.'"⁶⁸ Despite their anticipations, no explosion came. Wanzer and Longaker resigned in September, and were followed by Sawyer later in the year.⁶⁹ Percy Jones and Mitchell stayed on into 1921, before going home.⁷⁰

The reform program under which the Americans were to aid the opening of the Liberian frontier was a failure. Captain Kimberley in his report said:

From observations I infer that the present administration, in reality President King, for he dominates the situation to the smallest detail, does not want the American loan to go through. . . . I further infer that the [sic] President King will do his best to kill the American Loan either by a flat rejection . . . or . . . by an appeal to his people that the conditions of our loan are too severe, that they threaten the SOVEREIGN RIGHTS of Liberia, and that in effect they introduce a white man's government in place of the Black's . . . Not only does President King object to the American Loan being accomplished, but he does not desire the reform contemplated nor the institution of honest government.⁷¹

When the program for reform was submitted to the Liberian government, the President and legislature proposed changes, and further so procrastinated, that the U.S. reacted with threats. Bundy delivered a stiff warning note from State:

The Government of the United States would fail in its duty toward the Liberian people if it neglected at this time to point out by way of solemn warning that if American aid and the Loan Plan are rejected it may be necessary for their country to reconsider its objections to the establishment of a mandate over Liberia which it consistently continues to oppose.⁷²

Again King procrastinated, first by persuading the legislature that the note was not really from the State Department, but was all Bundy's idea, and then by suggesting that he, as President, should visit the U.S. to negotiate.⁷³ The loan was rejected, however, not by King but by the U.S. Congress. By that time, of course, the American commissioners had long since departed.

The attempts of the United States to reform Liberian administration, with the stated intention of insuring justice to the African of the far interior, failed. The driving force behind the reform movement at State had been the black Americans, Secretary Bundy and Colonel Young, aided by their white

DALVAN M. COGER

colleague, Reed Page Clarke. With the failure of the loan, Bundy was moved to Washington. Colonel Young died in Africa of yellow fever in 1922. And Clarke continued his career in the diplomatic service. The losers, of course, were the people of the interior

NOTES

1See authors "Americans in the Liberian Frontier Force," African Studies Association paper, 1974

2Estimates on the number of Settler-Liberians vary from nine to fifteen thousand, but there is a consensus that the number declined after 1900

3Again, authorities disagree on numbers, but modern census figures show they overestimated by as much as 100%.

4Young to War Department, October 7, 1915.

5Minister Francis to State, Dipl. 257, April 1, 1929.

6Memo to Liberian government, included with Bundy to State, Dipl. 119, September 29, 1915.

7T. C. Mitchell, "Report on Work in the Hinterland During 1916-17 and 18," included as exhibit 4 to enclosure 2 of letter, Worley to Phillips [State], June 12, 1919. (Bundy notes that Mitchell was really commissioned on April 25, 1917, probably as a result of Liberian official procrastination.)

8Ibid.

9Unsigned article in the African World, August 31, 1929.

10Young to War Department, October 7, 1915.

11Bundy to State, Dipl. 227, July 3, 1918.

12See my "Americans in the Liberian Frontier Force," cited in 1 above.

13Mitchell, "Report on Work in the Hinterland . . .," cited in note 7, above.

14President Howard's message to the Liberian Legislature, 1915.

15Bundy to State, Dipl. 189, February 20, 1918.

16Mitchell, "Report. . .," as cited in 7 above.

*Unless otherwise noted, references are to U.S. Department of State, Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Liberia, 1910-1929, National Archives, microfilm, 34 reels.

AMERICAN DISTRICT COMMISSIONERS ON THE LIBERIAN FRONTIER

17Ibid.

18Special Report by Secretary Morris, forwarded to State by Bundy, n.d. "Testimony of Sgt. Della Coni, L.F.F., March 24, 1918.

19Ibid., and letter, "Findings of Commission, June 21, 1918."

20State Department Memo, February 7, 1919, Office of the Third Assistant Secretary, "In re Dipl. #271 from Monrovia, November 24, 1918."

21See below, the fate of Mitchell in the Sandimannie affair.

22Bundy to State, telegram, June 10, 1918.

23Ltr, Mitchell to Bundy, May 30, 1918.

24Bundy to State, telegram, June 10, 1918.

25"Americans . . ." cited in note 1 above.

26King to Bundy, June 8, 1918.

27King was so notoriously anti-American that he had difficulty convincing President Howard that he had changed his position. Eventually he did so and the president accepted him in his administration.

28Bundy to State, telegram, June 10, 1918.

29Ibid.

30Ltr, State to Bureau of Insular Affairs, introducing Mitchell, August 8, 1918.

31Bundy to State, Dipl. 319, April 21, 1919.

32Ltr, Sawyer to Secretary of Interior [Liberia], June 7, 1919. Included with Dipl. 121, 1920.

33Ibid., and also Sawyer to Secretary of Interior [Liberia], June 26, 1919. Incl. with Dipl. 121, October 20, 1920.

34Ltr, Mitchell to Bundy, October 1, 1920, incl. to Dipl. 121. 1920.

35Sworn statement of Gendemeh (Sherman Coleman), July 19, 1919, incl. with Dipl. 121, 1920.

36Coleman noted of the 8 pawns one died, and only one was redeemed.

37"No government is better than the misgovernment that has disgraced Liberia's administration of her hinterland." Reed Page Clarke, Memo. April 24, 1916.

DALVAN M. COGER

38Ltr, Rachel Smith to Sandimannie, March 3, 1919, included with Dipl. 121. Mrs. Smith, wife of a late commissioner, writes asking about his estate. "Relative to persons he may have up there . . . you may dispose of them as you think best. But I wants all of the minor ones."

39Sawyer to Mitchell, September 6, 1920. Included with Dipl. 121.

40Secretary of Interior to Sandimannie, incl. with Dipl. 121. (Probably from Morris.)

41Bundy to State, February 19, 1920.

42Ibid.

43Worley to Scully [E. European Desk], Feb. 28, 1920.

44Johnson to State, Dipl. 68, April 14, 1920.

45Worley to Scully, February 28, 1920.

46Ibid.

47Secret Report, Commanding Officer, U.S.S. Chattanooga, June 18, 1920, p. 8. Hereinafter referred to as "Capt. Kimberley's Report."

48Worley to State, including letters from District Commissioners, prepared by Percy Jones, Jan. 17, 1921.

49Lonaker to Jones, May 5, 1920.

50"Americans . . .," see note 1, above, pp. 6, 7.

51Cap. Kimberley's Report, p. 8.

52Bundy to State, Dipl. 121, October 20, 1920, incl. Sawyer's Report, "Traffic in Human Beings."

53Longaker to Jones, March 7, 1920.

54Longaker to Jones, April 19, May 5, 1920.

55Longaker to Jones, May 20, 1920.

56Letters from Longaker to Jones and Wanzer commenting on each others and Sawyer's work, March to July, 1920.

57Longaker to Jones, June 30, 1920.

58Wanzer to Jones, March 19, 1920.

59Jones to Worley, January 17, 1921.

AMERICAN DISTRICT COMMISSIONERS ON THE LIBERIAN FRONTIER

60Mitchell to Bundy, inclosed with Bundy to State, Dipl. 88, June 30, 1920.

61Ibid.

62Ibid.

63Ibid.

64Bundy to State, Dipl. 88, June 30, 1920.

65Monrovia Weekly Review, May 29, 1920. Inclosed with Bundy to State, Dipl. 88, June 30, 1920.

66Ibid.

67Memorandum by Minister Johnson, given at Washington, D.C., August 9, 1920.

68Wanzer to Longaker and Sawyer, May 19, 1920.

69Wanzer to Jones, August 19, 1920.

70Jones to Worley, January 17, 1921.

71Capt. Kimberley's Report, p. 3, fwd.

72State to Monrovia, telegram, August 2, 1920.

73President King actually had his Liberian Consul in London contact the U.S. Consulate General there. Apparently he did not even trust his own Consular Officer in Baltimore, Dr. Lyons.

The Conduct of Liberia's Foreign Policy During The Tolbert Administration:
An Examination Of The Institutions And Instruments.

George K. Kieh, Jr.

1. Introduction

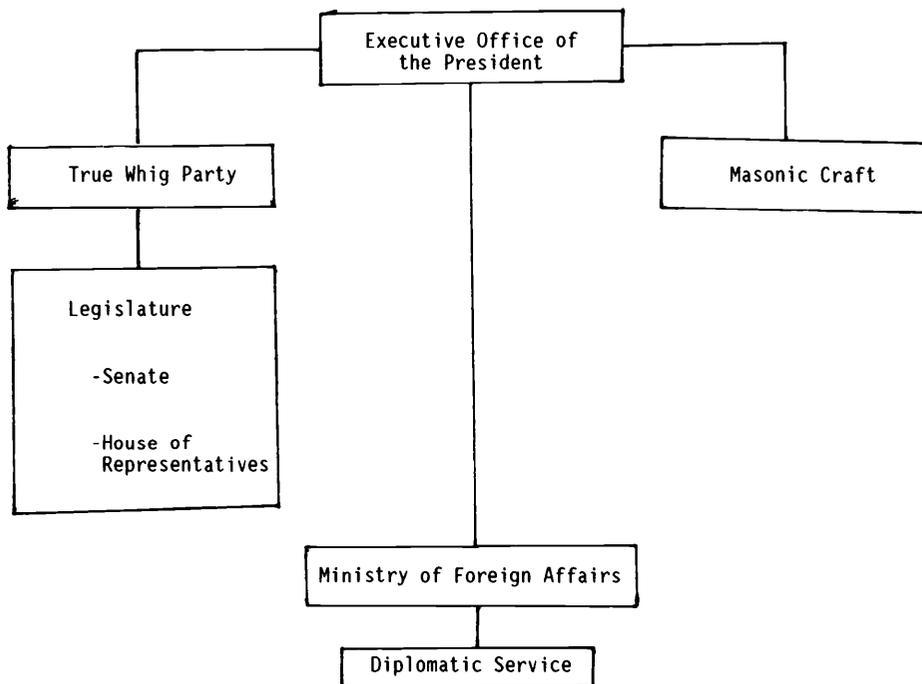
Generally, the dynamics of the foreign policy-making process proceeds in two major stages: 1) the formulation stage; and 2) the implementation stage. The former involves the participation of a network of institutions. This pattern is particularly characteristic of states that have a presidential form of government. The *raison d'être* for such an institutional arrangement has its roots in the basic contours of the doctrine of checks and balances. However, the presidential system of government is not necessarily the *sine qua non* for bureaucratic egalitarianism in the policy-making arena. In other words, there are states with presidential forms of government in which the doctrine of checks and balances is much more of a constitutional relic: some institutions, without any legal basis, are dominant than others in the foreign policy-making process. The latter stage entails the pursuance of the goals and objectives that have been delineated during the former stage. The actors in the international system--both state and non-state actors--have employed myriad instruments as the vehicles for implementing their foreign policies; and these have spanned a broad spectrum--ranging from diplomacy to warfare.

Against this background, our central concern in this paper is to examine Liberia's foreign policy during the Tolbert era, with particular emphasis on the following issues: 1) the nature and role of the institutions that were involved in foreign policy-making; 2) the instruments that were used to implement foreign policy; and 3) the impact of Liberia's presidential form of government and its attendant doctrine of checks and balances, on the foreign policy-making process.

GEORGE K. KIEH, JR.

Figure 1

The Structure of Liberia's Foreign Policy-Making Process.



Source: Author

NOTE: The Executive Office of the President includes the Ministry of State for Presidential Affairs.

THE CONDUCT OF LIBERIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

2. The Institutions

Two major sets of institutions constituted the bedrock of the Liberian foreign policy-making machinery (see figure 1); they were: 1) the formal institutions, or those that had a legal basis for their involvement in foreign policy-making; and 2) the informal institutions, or those that had no constitutional or statutory basis for participating in the foreign policy-making process. However, their involvement was propelled by the positions or prominence that they occupied in the power echelon.

2.1 The Formal Institutions

The formal institutions included: 1) the President; 2) the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; 3) the Ministry of State for Presidential Affairs; 4) the Senate; and 5) the House of Representatives.

2.1.1 The President

Constitutionally, the President was the principal conductor of foreign policy. In this vein, the constitution granted him a broad range of powers; and they can be classified into four major clusters: 1) military; 2) treaty-making; 3) appointive; and 4) recognition. In the military realm, the President as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, was empowered to call out the armed forces in the case that Liberia's sovereignty and territorial integrity were being encroached upon by external aggression. However, since the Post-Second World War Period, no Liberian Chief Executive, including President Tolbert, had cause to use or exercise this power.

Second, under the treaty-making powers, the president was empowered to negotiate treaties. However, in order for the treaties to become legal and operational, they had to be ratified by two-thirds of the Senate. During the Tolbert Administration, several important treaties were negotiated and ratified; they included: 1) the Mano River Union treaty--this brought into existence the Mano River Union, a mini-sub-regional organization, which groups Liberia and Sierra Leone; Guinea joined the organization later; 2) the Treaty of the Economic Community of West African states--this resulted in the formation of a sub-regional economic organization; and 3) the Mutual Defense Treaty with Guinea; the application of this treaty during the April 14, 1979 rice crisis, sparked a major foreign policy debate in Liberia. The central issue was that the use of Guinea troops by the Liberian Government to "maintain law and order" during the crisis, was a contravention of the pact.

Third, the constitution delineated the appointive powers viz:

He (president) shall nominate, and with the advice and consent of the Senate appoint and commission all ambassadors, and other public ministers and consuls . . . 1

GEORGE K. KIEH, JR.

Fourth, the president had the power of recognition. That is, he could recognize the independence of new states and new regimes. In the case of the former, during the Tolbert Administration, recognition was accorded to the Republics of Mozambique, Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde and Djibouti. In the latter case, recognition was extended to new regimes in Ghana, Nigeria, Ethiopia and Seychelles, among others, after the incumbent governments in these states were ousted. In addition, the president was empowered to establish, break and suspend diplomatic relations with other states. Under the Tolbert Presidency, Liberia, for the first time, formally established diplomatic relations with socialist states. Also, Liberia broke diplomatic relations with Israel in 1973 as an expression of solidarity with the Afro-Arab and Arab states. On two other occasions, the Tolbert Government expelled foreign diplomats and ordered the reduction in the size of their embassies' staffs; the first case was with the Soviet Union following the April 14, 1979 rice crisis; and the second case was with Romania around the same period.

2.1.2 The Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is the agency that is responsible for the implementation of foreign policy. Under this general rubric, three specific functions can be discerned: 1) it serves as a liaison with foreign governments and regional and global organizations (e.g., the Organization of African Unity and the United Nations); 2) it supervises and coordinates the foreign service--ambassadors, consuls-general, etc.; and 3) it serves as the official spokesman of the government on all matters relating to foreign affairs.

The functions of the Foreign Ministry are performed by the minister and a corp of officials. The Minister of Foreign Affairs is the principal head of the ministry; and he performs the following specific duties: 1) he serves as the principal advisor to the president on foreign affairs; 2) he is responsible for the overall direction, supervision, co-ordination and implementation of foreign policy. However, his actual role in foreign policy-making is contingent upon his relationship with the president. During the Tolbert Administration, three persons served as minister: first, J. Rudolph Grimes, Secretary of State when power was transferred to Tolbert in July 1971, was kept on until January 1972 when Rocheforte L. Weeks succeeded as minister. Weeks served from 1972-1973. C. Cecil Dennis, Jr. succeeded Weeks in 1973 and served to the end of the Tolbert regime in 1980. Although President Tolbert was the prime mover in the conduct of foreign policy, Foreign Minister Dennis played an active and pivotal role both in the formulation and the implementation of foreign policy.

The Foreign Minister is assisted by a staff consisting of two deputy ministers, several assistant ministers, directors and coordinators. The principal deputy minister supervises the foreign service while his counterpart, the deputy minister for administration, serves as the chief administrative officer. The various assistant ministers head and oversee the functions of the various bureaux--e.g., Afro-Asian Affairs, European Affairs, American Affairs--with the assistance of the co-ordinators and the directors.

THE CONDUCT OF LIBERIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

2.1.3. The Ministry of State for Presidential Affairs

The Ministry of State for Presidential Affairs was created by an Act of the National Legislature in 1972. This agency encompasses all of the assistants, aides and attaches (excluding military) to the president. Its major function is to assist the president in conducting the affairs of the state--both domestic and foreign. During the Tolbert Administration, the ministry had a small foreign policy "think-tank" which specifically dealt with foreign policy matters that required urgent attention. The "think tank" consisted of the minister and his deputies.

2.1.4. The Senate

Theoretically, the Senate was empowered to play a pivotal role in the conduct of foreign policy. That is, the constitution accorded the Senate the authority to provide the necessary "checks and balances". Against this background, the Senate's functions can be delineated thus: 1) exclusive functions--this involved the confirmation of appointments and the ratification of treaties; and 2) concurrent functions--these were powers that were jointly exercised with the House of Representatives: monetary matters, the declaration of war and the enactment of domestic legislations which arose from international agreements. First, the constitution gave the Senate the power to confirm foreign service appointments. Article III, Section I of the Constitution stipulated that "he (the president) shall nominate, and, with the advice and consent of the Senate, appoint and commission all ambassadors. . .² Procedurally, appointments submitted to the Senate were first forwarded to the Foreign Relations Committee. The committee was empowered to investigate, scrutinize and even cross-examine nominees. After that, the committee then submitted its findings to the full Senate; the Senate, could either confirm or reject the nominee; in the latter case, the president was required to submit other nominees.

The second exclusive power pertained to the ratification of treaties. Under the constitution, all treaties had to be ratified by two-thirds of the Senate's quorum present. The Senate could dispose of treaties in four major ways: 1) approve the proposed treaty as submitted; 2) approve the proposed treaty with reservations and amendments; 3) disapprove the proposed treaty; and 4) take no action; this, then, left the proposed treaty as unfinished business.

Also, the Senate performed concurrent functions with the House of Representatives in monetary matters, in the declaration of war and in the enactment of domestic legislations which arose from international agreements. In the case of monetary matters, the Senate had to concur with the House of Representatives on money bills which originated from the latter. Particularly, money bills that dealt with foreign policy included allocations to operate embassies and other missions abroad and the payment of dues to sub-regional, regional, continental and global organizations (e.g., The Mano River Union, the Economic Community of West African States, the Organization of African Unity and the United Nations).

GEORGE K. KIEH, JR.

The Senate also participated with the House of Representatives in the declaration of war. That is, in the event that the president considered declaring war, he was required to obtain legislative approval. The crucial role of the two houses rested in their power to prevent the declaration of war by the president: they could have rejected presidential request to declare war. However, the case of the declaration of war never arose during the Tolbert presidency.

The other concurrent power was the enactment of domestic laws in order to make operative international agreements. For example, the two houses passed legislation to put into effect the free movement provision that is stipulated in the Treaty of the Economic Community of West African States.

However, in practice, the Liberian Senate was a mere rubber stamp body. To paraphrase a veteran Liberian political commentator, pamphleteer and activist, Albert Porte, the Senate was a body from whose midst debate had since fled. In other words, the Senate did not provide the necessary "checks and balances": as the constitution stipulated: it approved virtually all appointments and treaties without debate. The impotence of the Senate can be attributed to the fact that its members were handpicked by the president and the True Whig Party and not truly elected by their constituencies. The lack of an electoral base accentuated the overdependence of the senators on the president for their political survival. This relationship made the senators subservient to the president and the True Whig Party. For example, according to the rules and regulations of the True Whig Party, senators were obliged to strictly observe the following:

1) to first inform the President and National Standard Bearer of the True Whig Party when they had objections to bills that were before the Senate. The President and National Standard Bearer would then call a conference to discuss the objections. The decision of the conference was to be binding on all [senators] who were members of the party.³ If there be no objection as provided in [the] rules, then [all] senators must support the bill.⁴

2) Members of the [Senate] who were members of the party and who refused to aid and support the party measures were to be penalized by the party in such manner as the Party's Executive Committee deemed necessary.⁵ In practice, there was an "iron clad" rule that stipulated that senators who did not vote for all measures--domestic and foreign--which originated from the President and National Standard Bearer would summarily lose their jobs; this was demonstrated in the impeachment of Grand Gedeh Senator Chea Cheapoo, who opposed the way in which decisions were reached in the Senate.

2.1.5 The House of Representatives

The involvement and participation of the House of Representatives in the conduct of foreign policy was limited compared to that of the Senate. The House's foreign policy powers were two-fold: 1) exclusive power--all money bills had to originate from the House; however, the concurrence of the Senate was required; and 2) concurrent powers--the House and the Senate exercised

THE CONDUCT OF LIBERIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

joint powers in the declaration of war and in the enactment of domestic legislations that arose from international treaties and agreements

2.2 The Informal Institutions

The informal institutions were those that had no legal basis for participating directly or indirectly in the conduct of foreign policy; their involvement was a consequence of tradition. We shall discuss two of such institutions: 1) the True Whig Party, and 2) the Masonic Craft

2.2.1 The True Whig Party

The 1955 actions of President Tubman against his political opponents led subsequently to the inception of the True Whig Party as the sole *de facto* political party in Liberia. Concomitantly, the True Whig Party gained broader and greater control of Liberia's domestic and foreign policies terrains. Specifically, in the foreign policy arena, the party formulated the general framework within which policy was formulated. For example, during its 33rd National Convention in Voinjama, Lofa County, the following foreign policy framework was established for the Liberian Government: 1) the promotion of inter-African cooperation on the sub-regional, regional and continental levels. In turn, this provided the motor force for the Tolbert Administration's "Good Neighbor Policy" and its emphasis on economic integration; and 2) the encouragement and promotion of Afro-Arab solidarity and cooperation.⁶ Under this caveat, the Tolbert Government made extensive contacts with the Arab World.

2.2.2 The Masonic Craft

The Masonic Craft was not only given social importance, but was also raised to the level of a state apparatus, which along with the [ruling class] supervised nation-building.⁷ In underscoring the significance of the craft as the bulwark of the Liberian State, President Tolbert affirmed that,

Liberia is a nation whose destiny has been inspired from its incipency by the living Gospel of Jesus Christ and the lofty ideals, precepts and principles of the craft masonry . . . of the nineteen Presidents of Liberia, thirteen have hailed from the masonic craft while from among our twenty-eight Grand Masters, we can list five Presidents, three Vice-Presidents, two Speakers of the House of Representatives and one Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Also worthy of note is the fact that a long line of eminent statesmen, jurists, clerics, politicians, administrators, technicians and public servants from all walks of life, have continually emanated from the Craft . . . ⁸

GEORGE K. KIEH, JR.

The powers of the Masonic Craft spanned the domestic setting to the foreign policy arena. In the latter, the craft's role can be delineated thus: 1) it served as a major forum for discussing sensitive foreign policy issues which could not be ordinarily discussed in the appropriate agencies of the government and the True Whig Party; and 2) it served as the body for scrutinizing key foreign service appointments. In fact, the prerequisite for occupying most major foreign policy positions was membership in the craft. In short, the Masonic Craft was the most powerful organ in the quadrumvirate--state, craft, party and church--that ruled Liberia

3. The Instruments

Nation-states use a plethora of instruments in order to enhance and promote their foreign policies. One of the oldest and most prominent instruments is diplomacy; it is multifaceted--it spans from negotiation to the use of force. Every state, whether it be a superpower, middle power or small power, uses some form of diplomacy in its intercourse with other states and other actors in the international system. However, the specific form of diplomacy is contingent upon 1) the problem, 2) the nature of the relations between the states that are involved, and 3) the consideration of other circumstances.

Like other small powers, Liberia used diplomacy as the central mode for implementing its foreign policy under the Tolbert Government. Two key forms of diplomacy were employed: 1) traditional diplomacy, and 2) personal diplomacy.

3.1 Traditional Diplomacy

During the Tolbert Administration, Liberia continued to use the establishment of diplomatic relations with other states as the principal feature of its traditional diplomacy. In this vein, it established diplomatic relations with twenty-two countries. As shown in Table 1, the geographical breakdown can be presented viz: 1) Africa--nine countries; 2) Asia--two countries; 3) Europe--eight countries; this figure predominantly consists of socialist states; 4) Latin America--one country; and 5) the Carribean--two countries. Also, of the twenty-two countries, Liberia established diplomatic missions (embassies) in three of them; Romania, the People's Republic of China and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

3.2 Personal Diplomacy

The Tolbert Administration employed personal diplomacy as its dominant mode of diplomacy; this mode had four dimensions: 1) the "Good Neighbor Policy", 2) Presidential attendance at summit meetings of sub-regional, regional and continental organizations and other pertinent international conferences, 3) Presidential visits to others countries, and 4) African unity

THE CONDUCT OF LIBERIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

Table 1

Roster of Countries with which Liberia
established diplomatic relations, 1971-1980.

<u>Country</u>	<u>Region</u>
Angola	Africa
Cape Verde	Africa
Comoro Islands	Africa
Djibouti	Africa
Guinea-Bissau	Africa
Mozambique	Africa
Sao Tome and Principe	Africa
Seychelles	Africa
Zimbabwe	Africa
People's Republic of China	Asia
Democratic Republic of Korea	Asia
Czechoslovakia	Europe
German Democratic Republic	Europe
Malta	Europe
Hungary	Europe
Poland	Europe
Romania	Europe
Union of Soviet Socialist Republics	Europe
Yugoslavia	Europe
Cuba	Latin America
Guyana	Caribbean
Barbados	Caribbean

Sources: Press Division, Executive Mansion, Presidential Papers, 1971-1977;
 and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, List of Liberian Diplomatic Personnel,
 (Monrovia, 1979).

GEORGE K. KIEH, JR.

Table 2

Visits paid by President Tolbert, 1971-1977.

Country	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	Total
I.. AFRICA								
Algeria	--	--	--	2	--	--	--	2
Ethiopia	--	1	--	--	--	--	--	1
Gambia	--	--	1	--	--	--	--	1
Ghana	--	1	1	--	--	--	1	3
Guinea-Bissau	--	--	--	--	1	--	--	1
Guinea	1	2	1	3	--	1	--	8
Ivory Coast	1	--	3	--	1	--	--	5
Kenya	--	1	--	--	--	--	--	1
Lesotho	--	--	--	1	--	--	--	1
Libya	--	--	--	1	--	--	--	1
Malawi	--	--	--	1	--	--	--	1
Morocco	--	--	--	1	--	--	--	1
Nigeria	--	1	1	--	--	1	1	4
Somalia	--	1	--	--	--	--	1	2
Sierra Leone	1	1	2	3	--	2	1	10
Tanzania	--	--	1	--	--	--	--	1
Uganda	--	1	--	--	--	1	--	2
Zaire	--	--	--	--	--	1	--	1
Zambia	--	--	--	1	--	--	--	1
II. EUROPE								
United Kingdom	--	--	--	1	--	--	--	1
Federal Republic of Germany	--	--	--	--	--	1	--	1
III. ASIA								
Lebanon	--	--	--	1	--	--	--	1
Saudi Arabia	--	--	--	1	--	--	--	1
Total	3	9	10	15	2	6	4	49

Source: Press Division, Executive Mansion, Presidential Papers, 1971-1977.

GEORGE K. KIEH, JR.

and solidarity. The "Good Neighbor Policy" was enunciated in 1971, immediately after Tolbert ascended to the presidency. Its underlying philosophy was rooted in Liberia's resolve to maintain and strengthen cordial relations with its neighbors--Sierra Leone, Guinea and the Ivory Coast. Against this background, President Tolbert held frequent and regular consultations with the Presidents of these three states. According to Table 2, between 1971-1977, President Tolbert visited Guinea eight times, the Ivory Coast five times and Sierra Leone ten times. The hallmark of the "Good Neighbor Policy" was the establishment of the Mano River Union in 1973. This sub-regional economic organization originally included Liberia and Sierra Leone; later, Guinea was admitted into membership.

Second, the personal attendance at summit meetings of sub-regional, regional, and continental organizations and other international conferences by the president was a salient feature of personal diplomacy. For example, between 1974-1980, President Tolbert attended all of the summit meetings of the Mano River Union. Between 1975-1980, he also attended all of the summit meetings of the Economic Community of West African States. During the period 1971-1979, he attended seven of the nine summit meetings of the Organization of African Unity. On the global level, he attended and addressed the Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly on Raw Materials and the Regular Sessions in 1974 and 1976 respectively.

Third, President Tolbert used personal visits to other countries as vehicles for enhancing Liberia's foreign policy; and these had two major advantages: 1) they provided the fora for the establishment of personal acquaintances with the heads of other states and governments; and 2) they provided the rare opportunity for face-to-face discussions. According to Table 2, between the period 1971-1977, President Tolbert paid forty-seven visits to various African States, spanning from the northern to the southern portions of the continent. Also, during the same period, he paid seven more visits to various European countries; two visits to the Caribbeans; three visits to North America; one visit to South America; and two visits to Asia.

Fourth, African unity and solidarity occupied a prominent position on the Tolbert Administration personal diplomacy agenda. The basic thrust was anchored on the premise that unity and solidarity were indispensable to inter-African cooperation and integration; hence, emphasis was placed on the peaceful resolution of disputes. In this direction, Liberia hosted the Organization of African Unity's Conciliatory Meeting on the Guinean-Senegalese dispute in 1972. During the same year, President Tolbert mediated in the border dispute between Tanzania and Uganda. In 1978, President Tolbert convened and chaired the "Monrovia Conference" on the Guinean-Ivorian dispute on the one hand and the Guinean-Senegalese dispute on the other hand. The two disputes were resolved. Finally, two key considerations underpinned Liberia's use of diplomacy as the locus for conducting its foreign policy: 1) the desire to depict Liberia as the doyen of African States; and 2) President Tolbert's personal desire and ambition to gain international recognition and accolade as the most prominent African statesman and apostle of peace and goodwill.

THE CONDUCT OF LIBERIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

4. Conclusion

The informal institutions--the True Whig Party and the Masonic Craft--played a dominant role in the foreign policy-making process in contradistinction to the formal ones (with the exception of the president). The underlying reason for this phenomenon was that the informal institutions were the most powerful forces in the power constellation of the political system; hence, the modus operandi made it imperative for agencies of the government, irrespective of their policy purview and legal origin, to be subservient to this de facto power arrangement.

Also, diplomacy was the dominant instrument that was used by the Tolbert administration to implement foreign policy. This was consistent with the traditional practice that had been established by previous governments. Diplomacy during the Tolbert presidency had two major forms: 1) the establishment of diplomatic relations with other states irrespective of their ideological orientation. This principle was a radical departure from the traditional tendency of Liberian foreign policy: that diplomatic relations not be established with socialist states; and 2) personal diplomacy was accorded primacy. This was reflected in the fact that during the period 1971-1977, President Tolbert personally paid sixty-seven visits to African, Asian, European and American states, and attended almost all of the summits of the Organization of African Unity, the Economic Community of West African States and the Non-Aligned Movement.

Finally, Liberia's presidential form of government did not insure the effectiveness of the doctrine of checks and balances. That is, the doctrine was virtually non-operative. This was because the Legislature which had the constitutional mandate to enforce and safeguard the implementation of the doctrine in the foreign policy sphere, was relegated to the status of simply rubber-stamping foreign policy decisions that were formulated by the executive branch. The impotence of the Legislature was occasioned by the fact that the undemocratic nature of the political system denigrated the salience of elections and the entire gamut of mass participation in the political process. Accordingly, the legislators had no electoral base of support; hence, they were subservient to the president and the barons of the True Whig Party who handpicked them. In other words, since they were dependent upon the president for their political survival, they permitted him to exercise unbridled monopoly over the foreign policy apparatus.

GEORGE K. KIEH, JR.

Notes

1Alfonso K. Dormu, The Constitution of the Republic of Liberia and the Declaration of Independence, (New York: Exposition Press, 1970), 30.

2Charles Huberich, The Legislative and Political History of Liberia, (New York: Central Book Co., 1947), 858.

3Platform and Revised Rules and Regulations of the True Whig Party, (Monrovia: MICAT Press, 1975), 59.

4Ibid.

5Ibid.

6Platform of the True Whig Party, Op Cit., 12.

7Stephen Hlophe, Class, Ethnicity and Politics in Liberia, (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America Inc., 1979), 186.

8William R. Tolbert, Jr., Address to the State Banquet in honor of the 86th Annual Session of the United Supreme Council of the Ancient Free and Accepted Rite of Free Masonry, cited in Hlophe, Op Cit., 187.

BOOK REVIEW

Stephen S. Hlophe, *CLASS, ETHNICITY AND POLITICS IN LIBERIA: A CLASS ANALYSIS OF POWER STRUGGLES IN THE TUBMAN AND TOLBERT ADMINISTRATIONS FROM 1944-1975*. Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1979, xii, 316 pp. ISBN. 0-8919-0721-2.

The repatriate Liberian versus indigenous Liberian class conflict has been a major theme in studies of Liberia's socio-political structure. Several authors have used varied dimensions of this theme to analyze the skewed distribution of income and political power so prevalent in Liberia before 1980, when a group of indigenous junior army officers overthrew the government of President William Tolbert to end more than a hundred years of minority repatriate Liberian rule.

Stephen Hlophe's book is yet another contribution to what some scholars of Liberian studies have referred to as "this overburdened theme." The book is a sober assessment of contradictions that have emerged from class conflicts between a ruling minority elite who were essentially descendants of blacks from the United States of America and indigenous Liberians. Utilizing Marxist socio-economic features as a background, the book sets out to demonstrate the process and dynamics of social change in Liberia.

Written in four parts, the book analyzes class conflict in Liberia from the Tubman years, 1944-1971, up to 1975 of the Tolbert administration. Some brief comparisons are made between Tubman and Tolbert, showing Tubman's political craftsmanship and ability to hold together the repatriate Liberian hegemony, and Tolbert's inability to present an effective leadership for the ruling class. Detailed examples of inter-class rivalry, family confrontations among the ruling class, and conflicts with rising educated indigenous Liberians are highlighted, exposing the losing control of Tolbert and the ruling class on the Liberian political forces in the 1970's. Parts I, II, and III deal respectively with a theoretical analysis of class and ethnicity as well as the rise of the repatriate Liberian oligarchic structure; social units which have been instrumental in the formation of a class of indigenous bureaucrats (technocrats); and the manipulation of existing social units by the technocrats for employment and other rewarding opportunities. Part IV is a concluding overview of the Liberian class conflict and an attempt to develop a theory of social change for the Liberian case.

The highpoint of the study is the detailed analysis in Parts II and III. It is a departure from the general trend of similar works on Liberia with its careful analysis of the emergence of the technocratic class of indigenous Liberians and the subsequent conflict between the repatriate Liberians and technocrats. This conflict, Hlophe notes, is a contradiction since this class of indigenous professionals emerged from an association with the repatriate Liberians either through the ward system, marriage, office or religious mentors, political patronage or the educational system used by the repatriate Liberians as a source of recruitment or token membership in the upper-class.

BOOK REVIEW

However, it was these technocrats that led the outspoken opposition to elitist rule which culminated in the downfall of the Tolbert Government and minority rule in 1980. But, like many other authors of Liberian studies before him, Hlophe did not give prominence to the role of the army in the emerging social change in Liberia, probably because the army was largely composed of tribes which ascribed to the Poro tradition, known for its fierce loyalty to authority. There is, on the other hand, another school of thought that holds the view that the army was alerted to the inequality of the Liberian society by the vocal expressions of the technocrats.

Although some may argue that the book does not present any significantly new knowledge in Liberian studies, Hlophe has, indeed, scored several highpoints. His ability to disaggregate the Liberian class conflicts to various levels of society, including varsity student politics, the educational system and features of employment is commendable. The relationship between ethnicity and employment in Liberia is highlighted by the author, confirming an earlier thesis project by Adanta Lymas (1975) that there was a direct correlation between ethnic representation in divisions of most ministries and the ethnic origin of the head of the division. His analysis of the role of voluntary associations as a source of perpetuation of the ruling elite and mobility for indigenous Liberians has given an extended angle to the work of others such as J. Gus Liebenow (1964) who analyzed the relationship between inter-family marriages among repatriate Liberians and political opponents. Hlophe's table and exposé of a three-way link between the then dominant True Whig Party, the Masonic Craft and government appointments (Part II, Chapter 5) provide the reader with a deeper insight into the forces and relations of power in Liberia before 1980. The revelation in the book of, heretofore, unpublished documents by anonymous authors in Monrovia and on local university campuses gives the reader an intimate familiarity with the mood of the indigenous Liberian majority in the years before the collapse of the Tolbert Government. Hlophe's treatment of apparatuses of upward mobility of indigenous groups lays the groundwork for what the reader is led to believe will be the eventual rule of the indigenous class.

Hlophe has predicted that the outcome of the confrontation between the ruling class and the indigenous populace will depend on the forces at work in the 1970s (p. 255). This prediction is particularly noteworthy for today's Liberia. The military rulers have been accused of adopting a style of leadership which is a parody of the group which they overthrew. The reluctance of many technocrats (who were part of the forces at work in the 1970s) to go along with the military has led to a new form of Marxist dialectic, with the indigenous technocrats and repatriate Liberians constituting a common force to oppose the military in a new class conflict.

BOOK REVIEW

Although rich in depth of research into the historical development of the repatriate Liberian class, the formation of the technocratic indigenous class and its painstaking analysis of linkages in the Liberian social system, the book fails to make a strong application of the Marxist theories of class conflict developed in earlier chapters to the already extensive analysis of class conflict developed by other writers. This would have been an appropriate subject for the concluding chapter of the book.

The book is an excellent source for those seeking to understand the conditions behind the fall of the repatriate Liberian domination of the Liberian scene. Its analysis concentrates on the period up to 1975, but events in Liberia since that time have given credence to the author's predictions concerning the consequences of the confrontation between the repatriate Liberians and the indigenous technocrats. This book, together with those of similar orientation by Togba-Nah Tipoteh (1983) and George Boley (1985), is a useful foundation for further research into class conflict in Liberia--this time with the military class opposing the indigenous technocrats and remnants of repatriate Liberians. Stephen Hlophe's study of class conflict in Liberia leads the reader toward a perception of the possibility of such a study.

Alfred B. Konuwa
University of Wisconsin--Milwaukee

BOOK REVIEW

F.P.M. van der Kraaij, The Open Door Policy of Liberia: An Economic History of Modern Liberia. Bremer Afrika Archiv, vols. 17/1 and 17/2. Bremen, 1983. DM 53, xxxv and XXI, 703.

This little known and scarcely reviewed work is the result of the author's field work and residence in Liberia from 1975 until 1978. During this period van der Kraaij, a Dutch citizen, taught economics at the University of Liberia. In Liberia, the author opportunely interviewed many of the foreign concessionaires; their operations form the basic material of this history. This publication appeared in an unlikely place: as volumes 17/1 and 17/2 in the Series of the Overseas Museum of Bremen. Thus, the free Hanseatic city perpetuates, at least literarily, its great African tradition already related by Wolfe Schmokel in his "The German Factor in Liberia's Foreign Relations" Liberian Studies Journal, Vol. VII, 1976-77, No. 1.

Fortunately for the reading public, the author chose to write in English rather than in Dutch or German. The quality of usage will, however, distress the English reader. Persistent capitalization of general nouns seems derived from nineteenth-century practice. Burdensome clauses and some tortuous phrases impede the flow of the narrative. The index is of limited value, consisting only of proper names and corporation titles. A subject-matter list would have speeded inquiry into a volume of some 703 pages. Unfortunately, this work shows all the signs of minimal editing. It also reads like a dissertation in its survey-like coverage, observational reporting, and, as the author admits, "occasional elaborate discussion of the preparation of concession agreements . . ." More should have been done prior to publication to compress and synthesize material, thereby offsetting a tendency to treat all facts and observations as worthy of rendition.

Van der Kraaij's survey is essentially the record of a country moving from subsistence to market economy. Capitalist corporations inaugurated an expansionist phase in Liberia through removal of constraints hindering the export sector. The country became another example of the "open economy" of the type described by A. G. Hopkins in his An Economic History of West Africa (London, Longman Grp., 1973): Liberia exported a small number of mineral and agricultural products, using the profits to purchase consumer goods; expatriate interests dominated important areas of the economy accounting, in some years, for the transfer of an estimated one-third of the national income abroad; the great industrial powers exerted considerable influence over economic policy. This model is Hopkins', however. It would have been helpful if van der Kraaij had recourse to a similar device to lead the reader through many pages of text. It would also have been instructive to know the state of the traditional economy, prior to the arrival of foreign firms, measured by indices such as those developed by Claude Meillassoux in The Development of Indigenous Trade and Markets in West Africa (Oxford, 1971), in order to realize the magnitude of change occasioned by the concessionaries--or, as well reported by Clower, Dalton et al. in their Growth without Development: An Economic Survey of Liberia (Evanston, 1966), to know how much dubious growth without real development has taken place.

BOOK REVIEW

Another aspect of the open economy according to van der Kraaij was the perpetuation of expatriate economic dominance. A mutually advantageous modus vivendi concluded by foreigners and repatriate Liberians perpetuated the country's dependence upon foreign investments and an export-oriented production sector. The quid pro quo for the elite was political hegemony in a country where the traditional population outnumbered them fifty to one. Not surprisingly, concludes van der Kraaij, repatriates made no attempt to alter the enclave character of Liberia's economy nor to link the economic activities of foreign investors with those of national entrepreneurs. The strictures of dependence remained by choice. Liberianization in firms progressed only to the point where the concessionaires became the repository for repatriates, and others allied to the Tolbert clan, who were unemployable in government.

This "selling of Liberia" by the elite outraged van der Kraaij who proposed reforms to control the impact of future foreign concessions. Written before the 1980 coup, his recommendations were based upon the assumption that the pre-Doe social structure would continue. Thus we will not know if his wishes would have been seriously entertained and his improvements implemented. On balance, they seem rather altruistic. Recommendations to the effect that the Liberian government establish an efficient administration, formulate long-term policy principles, and eradicate corruption are good precepts for any government. And would such laudable measures be acceptable to those who felt that their implementation might lead to a diminution of power? It is also not clear from this survey what alternative Liberia possessed to foreign exploitation of its natural resources. Withdrawal of investment could lead to economic collapse. And the transfer of important economic tasks to Liberians, another possibility, is certainly desirable but problematical if, as the author admits, the result would be the creation of inefficient parastatals.

In summary, van der Kraaij has given us a valuable cumulative record of foreign capitalist operations in Liberia. They are all here--Firestone, Lamco, the logging companies, etc.--and their operations are amply recorded. It is particularly important that the author rendered his service when he did because the Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Foreign Affairs archives seem to have suffered recent and severe depletion. Thus, we would not have known the particular difficulties encountered by the Liberian government in its successful attempt to persuade Firestone to eliminate some of its lucrative advantages secured by the original 1926 planting agreement. But the recovery of documents was a difficult task:

After weeks of research spent on the locating and studying of relevant documents concerning Firestone's pricing policy and the Liberian Government's policy in this respect, the present author began to feel increasingly embarrassed and frustrated since many documents were apparently missing from the (Firestone) files and could not be traced. One day in November, 1978, after a discussion with the (only) Liberian in charge of the Agricultural Sector of the Concessions Secretariat, I asked him for a sheet of note paper. He opened one of the drawers of his desk and handed me some papers,

BOOK REVIEW

typed on one side, which to my great surprise and disgust, contained part of a most valuable document for which I had been searching. No one will ever know how long the papers had obviously been lingering in and around his desk.

Thus, the author on the problems of the researcher in the third world.

Arthur J. Knoll
The University of the South

NEW BOOKS ON LIBERIA

(Current Listing does not preclude future review)

1. BLACK COLONIALISM, THE AMERICO-LIBERIAN SCRAMBLE FOR THE HINTERLAND, by Yekutiel Gershoni (Westview Press, 1985: 134 pages; \$19). Study is a re-working of the old thesis of Professor Monday Akpan and others that the repatriate founders of the Liberian state practiced "black colonialism" in their subjugation of indigenous Liberians. It focuses on ~~the~~ 1900-1930 period.
2. AFRICAN AND AMERICAN VALUES, LIBERIA AND WEST AFRICA, by Katherine Harris (University Press of America, 1985: 101 pages; \$7.50 paper). An account of the impact of American values on the west African settlement that became the Liberian state. Focuses on the period to 1837.
3. BIG POWERS AND SMALL NATIONS, A CASE STUDY OF UNITED STATES-LIBERIAN RELATIONS, by Hassan B. Sisay (University Press of America, 1985: 202 pages; \$11.75 paper). An interesting and often refreshing account of the uneven and unequal relationship between the United States and its peculiar offspring, the Liberian state.
4. LE LIBERIA, by Louis Dollot (Presses Universitaires De France, 1981: 128 pages). A former French Ambassador to Liberia introduces contemporary Liberia to the French audience in the famous collection, "Que sais-je?"
5. HISTORICAL DICTIONARY OF LIBERIA, African Historical Dictionaries No. 38 by D. Elwood Dunn and Svend E. Holsoe (Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1985: 304 pages; \$22.50). A reference study that provides short pieces on major historical events, important places, leading figures, and significant aspects of culture, religion, economics, and politics.
6. LIBERIA, A COUNTRY STUDY, Area Handbook Series of the U.S. Department of the Army, prepared by Foreign Area Studies, The American University and edited by Harold D. Nelson, 1985: 340 pages; \$12.00). A semi-official American reference work on Liberia.
7. JUSTICE, JUSTICE: A CRY OF MY PEOPLE, edited by Nya Kwiawon Taryor, Sr. (Strugglers' Community Press, 1985: 319 pages; \$9.95 paper). Compilation of documents highlighting the political activities of the Movement For Justice In Africa during the 1970s.

CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE

Amos J. Beyan, a Liberian, is Assistant Professor of History at The State University of New York, Plattsburgh.

Dalvan M. Coger is Associate Professor of History at Memphis State University.

Alfred M. Konuwa, a Liberian, is a doctoral candidate in Economics at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

George K. Kieh, a Liberian, is a doctoral candidate in International Relations at Northwestern University.

Svend E. Holsoe is Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Delaware.

Arthur J. Knoll is Professor of History at The University of the South.

