



Centre for  
Human Rights and  
Restorative Justice

# REFERENCES TO COLONIALISM, COLONIAL, AND IMPERIALISM

Liberia Truth Commission

## Abstract

A list of references to colonialism, colonial, and imperialism in the Liberia Truth Commission.

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## Links to Data Visualization

This section contains links to all data visualization for the Liberia report.

### Comparison Charts

- [References to Colonialism, Colonial, and Imperialism chart](#)
- [References to Colonialism, Colonial, and Imperialism excel list](#)

### Word Trees

- [Colonial](#)
- [Colonialism](#)
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## References to Colonialism, Colonial, and Imperialism

This section contains all references to colonialism, colonial, and imperialism from the Liberia report.

<Files\\Truth Commission Reports\\Africa\\Liberia.TRC\_.Report-FULL> - § 27 references coded [1.04% Coverage]

### Reference 1 - 0.05% Coverage

until June 22, 2009.

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Liberia's triumphant and tortuous history of conflict did not begin in January 1979 or end on October 14, 2003 (the TRC's temporal mandate period). Rather, the historical antecedents are woven deeply into its troubled socio-political and psychological culture. Until the November 8, 2005, run-off elections and subsequent inauguration of President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf as Liberia's first post conflict democratically-elected president and Africa's first female democratically-elected president, Liberians were forced to live under various forms of oligarchic, autocratic, militaristic and authoritarian governments. In spite of the challenges of a verdant republic, the unsavory character of its various regime types, as Africa's first Republic and one of only two independent nations in Africa (Ethiopia being the other) throughout the colonial era, Liberia also served, among other things, as a sanctuary for Africans seeking to escape colonial oppression, an activist African nation while holding the presidency of the UN General Assembly in 1969, and a bulwark advocate against Apartheid in South Africa.

Our Country's troubled and dichotomous

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infamous Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade.

Contrary to wide perceptions about the fissure between the settlers and natives during this period, however, which almost invariably cast the rift in terms of blacks oppressing blacks, or settlers colonizing the indigenes, the root causes of historical political tensions between the settlers and natives are far more complicated than Black Colonial paradigm machinations. Contrary to the widely held presumption that there was a premeditated plan by one group (e.g. Americo-

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Liberians) to dominate and

### Reference 3 - 0.01% Coverage

the settlers and natives

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during the period arose mainly due to competition over slavery, trade, land, and political legitimacy, rather than as a result of internal colonialism.

In spite of this, native

### Reference 4 - 0.03% Coverage

agents of the American

Colonization Society for the first several years of their existence. Although the U.S. government funded much of the American Colonization Society's efforts, it was clear that the United States never intended to formally establish itself as a colonial power in Liberia. Liberia became a sovereign nation under Americo-Liberian rule in 1847. The indigenous inhabitants of the territory claimed for Liberia were largely antagonistic to the establishment of the Liberian nation. In fact, the American Colonization Society, and later the fledgling Liberian government, was at war with various indigenous tribes over territory and trade routes throughout the 1800s. Liberia's complex history created a 'state of contestation' which remains today a major source of conflict and disunity.

### 1.3 History of the

#### Reference 5 - 0.02% Coverage

entire West African sub-region.

As Liberia began to establish itself as a new nation, a small number of AmericoLiberian families and their patronage networks dominated all aspects of government, economy, the security sector, commerce, and social advancement. They acquired land and extended their influence and authority deeper into the hinterland from the coast by force and authority of the settlers' Government which grew from colony to commonwealth and then statehood 25 years later in 1847.

The Government in Liberia was

#### Reference 6 - 0.01% Coverage

circumstances in the United States

will lead to the emergence of pro American colonial interests in exploring back-toAfrica schemes.

Slavery was once a universal

#### Reference 7 - 0.03% Coverage

The ACS in Pre-Liberia

The establishment of the ACS eventually led to the establishment of the Republican State of Liberia that engendered a conflicted relationship between the settlers and indigenous peoples of Liberia. With unsettled motives and objectives, sometimes conflicting, the ACS mission sought to impose culture, religion, economic, social and political standards on a nation of people of diverse identities. Central to understanding the socio-political conflict and its degeneration into armed conflict in the evolving history of Liberia is the choice made by the early leadership of Liberia from colony, to commonwealth and statehood. It was a choice of purpose or political direction for the new enterprise.

One option was a Euro

#### Reference 8 - 0.05% Coverage

legitimacy. The choice, in

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time, alienated, marginalized, degraded not only the majority of the inhabitants of the Liberia area, but implicitly the very westernized black leaders who bought into and adopted the views derived from American colonialist sentiments. Such sentiments became the philosophical foundation on which white American colonial leaders established and ruled the Liberian entity for the first 25 years of its existence.

The ACS was a voluntary private organization (NGO) of colonists founded in Washington D.C., USA on December 16, 1816; both as an alternative and a consequence of the abolition of slavery in America. Founded under the principles of colonization, Liberia was never an American colony. The US Government provided US\$100,000 to the ACS without saying it was repatriation of freed slaves to Africa. As the name implies, the initial objective was to establish ,<a colony in Africa to take free people of color<residing in our country away from the United States...to Africa or such other places as congress may deem expedient'- (Rev Robert Findley, delegate to the ACS conference). Paul Cuffy ceded his back to Africa movement for the repatriation of freed black slaves to Africa to the ACS in 1816 before his death in 1817.

The ACS was formed by

#### Reference 9 - 0.02% Coverage

The American society for  
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colonizing the free people of color of the United States' was inaugurated December 28, 1816 to establish a colony (Liberia) for freed slaves in Africa. Many of them, especially Southerners supported emigration to Africa in order to get rid of the freed black population whom they perceived as a major threat to slavery in America. By eliminating free blacks, they thought they could guarantee indefinitely the perpetual system of slavery that essentially under girded their entire economic system.

While industrialization may have reduced

#### Reference 10 - 0.03% Coverage

a Settlers' Hegemony (1822 – 1847)

The first group of settlers that arrived in Africa under aegis of the ACS, sailed on the Elizabeth in 1817. On board were eighty-six men, women and children from New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Maryland and the District of Columbia. These were seen as pioneers who would help build the colony. After a few weeks stay in Freetown, they moved on to Sherbo Island where all the agents namely Samuel A. Crozier, Samuel Bacon and John P Blankson, and about half the population of the colonists were wiped out by malaria. Amidst initial constraints, they were able to resettle some 13,000 African Americans and several thousand recaptured African slaves known as Congos from 1821-1867.

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5.2.1. Settler's

#### Reference 11 - 0.02% Coverage

000 reached Cape Mesurado alive.

Jehudi Ashmun became agent and took steps to lease, annex or buy tribal lands along the coast and the inland through aggressive means. Soon the Mesurado Colony was consolidated and expanded to what later became the colony of Liberia. Commenting on these events, Richard West, author of ,Back to Africa: A History of Sierra Leone and Liberia' (1970) asserts that:

,[t]he deal had been

#### Reference 12 - 0.02% Coverage

under aegis of the ACS.

The New York City Colonization society and the Pennsylvania Colonization Societies formed the Edina and Port Cresson colonies in 1832; the Maryland Colonization society set up the Maryland colony in 1834; the Mississippi in Africa colony was founded by the Mississippi Colonization society in 1834. The Bassa Cove Colony was built on the ruins of Port Cresson after it was destroyed by the natives of

76

the area in an

#### Reference 13 - 0.11% Coverage

by the natives of

76

the area in an attack to register their protest for the encroachment of their land by the settlers. In 1836, Edina and Bassa Cove were united into one colony called Grand Bassa Cove Colony. Bassa Cove was in turn incorporated into Liberia in 1839 as was New Georgia. Maryland in Africa became the state of Maryland in Liberia in 1841 until 1859 when it became part of Liberia. Mississippi in Africa was incorporated into Liberia as Sinoe County in 1842.

#### 5.2.2. From Colony to Commonwealth

The expansion of the colony did not occur without opposition from the indigenous people. There were several deadly conflicts that occurred between the two communities over land during this period. Before the arrival of the settlers, land was owned in common among tribal Liberians. Each town or village owned the immediate land surrounding it. The land was subdivided into smaller units among families (extended families). Land boundaries consisted of well known land marks that were known to all- hills, rivers, valleys and so on. Thus, from time immemorial each village or family unit knew the extension of its land. No monetary fee was paid for land among the aboriginal Liberians and land ownership was collective, not private. Therefore, to the natives, no single individual or even king could sell the people's land because it was non-transferable and sacred. It was owned by the living and the unborn. They were not ready to let go the land and the settlers did not recognize this significant factor.

The ACS was powerful and became successful in its expansion and acquisition, winning one battle after another with the aid of some local chiefs. One notable case is the threat of King Soa Boso who was asked to intervene by the settlers. He was a powerful Madingo King of the Condo Confederate of the Islamic faith. He pledged to cut off the head of any native who opposed the settlement having sold their land and received benefits for it. He emphasized the tradition of not selling lands but recognized the need of returned Africans to settle on the land of their ancestry. His intervention settled the conflict over Ducor and the settlers maintained it thereafter. Expansion continued by outright purchase, annexation and treaties of protection or friendship to title or deeds of ownership. On his death bed in 1829, King Peter of Bushrod Island placed his people under the protection of the Colony.

The authoritarian and dominant role

#### Reference 14 - 0.01% Coverage

aid of a gun.

77

The colonies expanded into a Commonwealth with raging conflicts from 1821 to 1839.

Wars

Dei-British/Settler "Water

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1832 1835 1838

1839-1840

The Commonwealth adopted the governing structure and social, political policies of the colonies and resisted slave trade just the same. The agents of the ACS were heads of the colony; powerful and authoritarian, embodying all the powers of executive, legislative and judicial functions. Ali Ayers was replaced by Elijah Johnson (Johnson Street) who held on for Jehudi Ashmun. Lott Carey (Cary Street) acted up to the arrival of Ashmun's successor, Richard Randall (Randall Street). Randall died prematurely and was replaced by Joseph Mechlin (Mechlin Street). Mechlin and his successor John B. Piney (a Presbyterian Minister) agencies were brief because the settlers were disgruntled with their authoritarian rule and rioted for greater voice in the affairs of the colony. Ezekiel Skinner succeeded Pinney who was accused of dictatorship and widespread opposition and illness forced him to resign. He was replaced by Antony B Williams, the last colonial agent who ruled until the colony became a Commonwealth in 1939. During the colonial period (1821 – 1839) a close relationship existed between the church and the colonial administration and state. Most early schools were operated by Christian missions and most of the early leaders of the ACS and the colony were Christian leaders, justifying why it has been said that Liberia was founded on Christian principles. The first Christian denominations were the Baptists, Methodist and Presbyterian; the Baptist as early as 1826. The settlers out rightly rejected the traditional religions and Islamic practices of the natives and made it their mission to, in the words of Elliot Cresson, a founder of the Bassa Cove, 'Christianize' and impose 'Christian influence and operation upon the surrounding heathens'.

Conflicts could have been avoided if the settlers had recognized the authority of the natives instead of the ACS which repatriated them to Africa. Similarly, had the colonists abandoned their colonial ambitions, relationship between the two people might have been more cordial. The laws of the colony set the settlers apart from the

78 Years

natives. A case

#### Reference 16 - 0.11% Coverage

apart from the

78 Years

natives. A case in point, Article 23, of the Colony's Digest of Laws in 1824 provided; 'no colonist shall deal with the natives for land'. This provision continued in the Commonwealth and Republican Constitutions until the republic became history in 1980 (also Article V, Section 14, constitution of Liberia). Thanksgiving Day was celebrated by the settlers to thank God for their 'victories' over the natives in 1822.

In 1839 several colonies realized it was in their common interest (finance, security, scanty population, etc) to amalgamate as one unit. The Colonies of Bassa Cove and Cape Mesurado (Montserrado) were united into a Commonwealth. Three years later, in 1842, the colony of Mississippi in Africa joined the commonwealth as Sinoe County. The Commonwealth continued in the same way as a colony rather than change the policies of the Colony even as greater expansion by annexation would have required. One of such exclusionary laws of marginalization provided that 'no native African or Africans, excepting such as may be brought here under the character of recaptured Africans shall be entitled to elective franchise, at least three years immediately preceding the election at which the privilege is claimed and shall have during continuous period exhibited a uniformed civilized life'.

The head of the Commonwealth was a Governor appointed by the ACS. Its first governor was Thomas Buchanan, (Buchanan City), former agent of Bassa Cove. He consolidated the Commonwealth, extended his influence and mediated the DeyGola war of 1838. He ruled until 1841 when he was succeeded by Joseph Jenkins Roberts. The commonwealth had a separate executive, judiciary and legislative bodies but denied natives of any rights of participation and sought to keep the two communities apart. The

Commonwealth needed a controlled territory, and authority over its territory. This exercise of authority was questioned and challenged by foreign powers operating in the area who had become accustomed to unfettered trade and movement in the West African region. Moreover, these British and French colonialists had territorial ambitions to annex additional Liberian territories. This threat encouraged many kings to join the commonwealth in support against foreign colonial aggression on their territories. The clamor for independence was echoed by the settlers who also became increasingly resentful to the autocratic and direct rule of the ACS, which denied them basic rights and freedoms in deciding matters that affected them and the Commonwealth.

### 5.3 State Making and

#### Reference 17 - 0.02% Coverage

the First Republic (1847 – 1944)

The impulses that led to the creation of the state were both internal and external. The internal relates to the difficult encounter of cultures and peoples. The early settlers and their settlements represented a grand experiment, driven by colonial sentiments of ‘civilizing and christianizing’ indigenous peoples. The very messy process of forging a nation that ensued subsequently was punctuated by many violent encounters (over 90 deadly conflicts in all from 1821 to 1944- as documented in

79

Levitt’s ‘The Evolution of

#### Reference 18 - 0.13% Coverage

raiding and slave trading.

84

The repatriate sphere of influence initiated at Cape Mesurado seemed destined to expand – into the hinterland beyond the earlier 40 mile limit from the Coast, and thus to the borders with European imperial powers. The European scramble for African territory impacted adversely on Britain-Liberian relations, hitherto friendly (Britain was the first to recognize Liberia’s independence, and provided material support in the fight against the lingering Atlantic slave trade). It soured further Franco-Liberian relations. While an uneven 1885 Anglo-Liberian Treaty ‘settled’ one boundary, the other, still not settled as post-World War II decolonization gained momentum, was simply abandoned by the Liberian government because, as it reasoned, its dispute was with France, not its new African neighbors. Border settlement issues had pitted Liberia against powerful imperial forces. Though even the partial but significant resolutions signaled an end to imperial encroachment, it did not resolve the ongoing challenges of nation-making. How now would the governance of the indigenous majority be sustainably assured within the wider Liberian sphere of influence?

The process was slow. The Liberia of President Joseph J Roberts and his successors demonstrated political competition within a circumscribed elite core with a majority of the population either as ‘subjects’ or decidedly on the socio-political periphery. Liberia’s civilized core contrasted to its indigenous periphery. Consistent with inherited autocracy from the colonial era, and in harmony with the founding myth, the periphery would enter the core in keeping with assimilation strategies or when fully socialized into the culture of the core. The implications were at once political and social. The political arrangement was thus characterized by presidential ascendancy in a tripartite system that included a legislature and a system of courts. Though there was occasional openness to allow limited entry from the periphery, this consideration was not applicable to the presidency. Vice President Henry Too Wesley, a Grebo-Liberian and the first indigenous vice president in the country’s history was unceremoniously dropped from the ticket at the end of President C.D.B. King’s second term in 1928 in favor of the notorious Allen Yancy who was the lead culprit in the contract labor scandal that brought down the King



administration in 1930. Presidents King and Edwin Barclay effectively frustrated Consul General Albert Momolu Massaquoi, a Vai-Liberian, in his own presidential quests. And the Kru-Liberian politician Didhwo Twe had to flee the country twice (1930s and 1950s) to escape the wrath of Presidents Barclay and Tubman. Jackson F Doe who stood in line to become vice standard bearer and vice president of Liberia was passed over by President Tolbert twice at the TWP convention in favor of VP Greene and VP Warner after Greene's death.

The immediate successors of President

#### Reference 19 - 0.05% Coverage

Instruments of Coercion and Slavery

To enforce the de jure limits of the state, Liberia in 1908 for the first time, created a national army, the Liberian Frontier Force (LFF). This development, even though consistent with state-making, engendered tremendous political conflicts of its own. The LFF became a tool for the enforcement of the writ of the Liberian government in the hinterland. An elaborate government 'native policy' was instituted with at least two problematic features (or outcomes): One was subversion of the Constitution by endowing the Executive Branch with legislative and judicial powers within the hinterland, a practice reminiscent of the 1822-1847 colonial periods. The other problematic feature of the native policy was the license it gave to some unscrupulous interior officials and their traditional cronies which led to unspeakable atrocities across Liberia's interior region. Talking about 'roots of conflict,' the memory of these atrocities survives in documents, and there are Liberians who continue to hand down to a younger generation the facts of this ugly past in which respectable chiefs and fatherly heads were publicly humiliated, children and women often abused, forced labor and cruelty in collecting the 'hut tax' impositions were common.

By the first quarter of

#### Reference 20 - 0.02% Coverage

and natives but to

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appease indigenous nationalism and turn back the 'wind of change' blowing across Africa with rising tides of nationalism especially in Nigeria and Ghana still under colonial rule. With these policies and political stability, the Liberian economy under Tubman grew very sharply over time but without a corresponding national development and improvements in the living standards of the people.

Three periods marked the 27

#### Reference 21 - 0.04% Coverage

the US sphere of influence.

One other significant development during this period was the emergence of strong and credible opposition to the government of President Tolbert. In the early 1970s, two pivotal groups emerged in Liberia. The Movement for Justice in Africa (MOJA), a radical movement composed of members of the Liberian intellectual community, was founded in Liberia in 1973. Americo-Liberians and indigenous Liberians founded the Progressive Alliance of Liberia (PAL), in the United States in 1975. MOJA and PAL embraced militant African nationalism and Marxism respectively. Both movements became the first formidable opposition to the True Whig Party and its policies. MOJA became particularly vociferous against Tolbert's regime. The movement had a Pan-African agenda and was seriously opposed to Apartheid and neo-colonialism, and eventually oligarchy in Liberia. Two prominent leaders of MOJA and PAL were Dr Amos Sawyer and Bacchus Matthews, respectively.

The leadership of the True

#### Reference 22 - 0.03% Coverage

of Doe's Executive Mansion guard.

This reprisal against the Nimba people made Doe increasingly unpopular and isolated. His coup and ascendancy to power which was widely welcomed, not only by the indigenous people of Liberia who had languished for over a century under humiliating and excruciating social, political, cultural subjugation, but also across Africa where many saw the development as bolstering the continent's quest to rid Africa of all forms of colonial domination, became regrettable and denounced. The Americo-Liberian government, although was mainly composed by nominally Africans, it was widely regarded as somewhat colonial in nature, given its pedigree in the supremacist legacies of the American Colonial Society (ACS). The cacophonous encomiums that heralded

#### Reference 23 - 0.02% Coverage

##### 2. Women: Survivors and Peacemakers

Historically, women were generally excluded from participation in political life, as it was only until 1947, a full century after independence that women were accorded the right to vote. There is no mention anywhere in historical accounts of women participation in the political life of the colony, prior to 1947, except for their participation in the making of the Liberian flag at independence.

In gender terms the dichotomy

#### Reference 24 - 0.03% Coverage

of their birth and nativity.

The American-borne early leadership chose the latter option of building a separatist state as a political direction and philosophy. This choice of the latter is at the root of Liberia's as yet unresolved historical problem of political identity and legitimacy. The decision to adopt a Euro-American styled settlement with a civilizing and Christianizing mission in time alienated, marginalized, degraded not only the majority of the inhabitants of the Liberia area, but also the black-settlers, many of whom suffered slavery and harbored American colonialist sentiments. Such sentiments became the philosophical foundation on which white American colonial leaders established and ruled the Liberian entity for the first 25 years of its existence.

The engendered political culture was

#### Reference 25 - 0.03% Coverage

conflicts, which often was violent.

Increasingly suspicious of the natives, the settlers sought to maintain an independent identity, and nation while at the same time realizing that it had to expand in land and acquire more territories to exert its legitimacy. The natives were also suspicious of the settlers motives and thought they were out on a mission to exterminate them. Pressures from the French and British colonial powers nearby also influenced the decision of the settlers to expand territorially. The natives, of course resisted and for many years there were violent conflicts with deadly consequences until the end of the Kru Confederacy War of 1915 when the economy became to grow under President Arthur Barclay who became more engaging under his appeasement policies.

Prior to what may be

#### Reference 26 - 0.02% Coverage

##### 10.1.2. Antecedent Causes

Liberia's checkered history is replete with conflicts as we have narrated above. During the pre-colonial period, there were many conflicts and wars between the natives themselves until the colonial period from 1822-1847 when the settlers intervened and a crisis of different dimension surfaced. After independence in 1847 the new state of Liberia had its own set of conflicts bordering on legitimacy, inclusion and identity, land, and struggle for supremacy. For over a century

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thereafter, the settlers dominated

#### Reference 27 - 0.01% Coverage

s rise as a

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regional power led to chilly relations between the two states. As a result, France had discouraged its former colonies, such as Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire, from engaging in any peace agreements which would have raised Nigerian influence in the region.

The Ivorian government also provided