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African-Americans' Rule in Liberia (1840-1900)

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Dedication

With all my love to:

- My lovely parents who spiritually strengthened me with their prayers.

- My lovely husband and children who have kept looking forward to my post graduation.

- My dear brothers and sisters.

- My nephew Mourad and my friend Hamida who have encouraged me all the way through my study.

- My friends who kept pushing me to do my best.

- All my colleagues.

- All my teachers.

- All those who believed in me and prayed for my success.

o **Naima Guerrout**

I dedicate this humble work to my dear parents who have devoted their lives to building mine. I will be eternally grateful for their love, support, patience, and for everything they have done so that I can reach this level. I cannot name all people, but a special thanks should be addressed to my beloved sisters, brothers, colleagues, teachers, and to all those who believed in me and helped me to be the person I am today.

o **Amina Berrahal**

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Abstract

Liberia is the oldest independent country in Africa dating back to 1847, and it is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world. The main division has traditionally been between the settler-Liberians and the sixteen identified groups of indigenous people. The country was founded by the American Colonization Society of America when former slaves arrived at its shores in an effort to be repatriated to Africa. It took the United States fifteen years to recognize Liberia's independence, during the American Civil War (1861-1865). Liberia's declaration of independence was issued in 1847, thus making it the oldest modern African republic. The Liberians managed to keep and maintain their independence during the European colonial era. This dissertation attempts to trace back the establishment of the Republic of Liberia and the African-Americans' rule from 1840 to 1900, following an analytical approach.

The first chapter is devoted to a historical background to Liberia and its natives. Then, the second chapter attempts to examine the foundation of Liberia and its political sphere after independence. Finally, the third chapter focuses on some aspects of Liberia's society and economy.

After the process of analyzing the data collected from the different sources, we found out that the abolition of slavery in the West was a step towards the establishment of Liberia. The latter applied a similar ruling system to that adopted in the United States. i.e. the society and political structure of Liberia had been modelledalmost identically to the United States. Eventually, these lead to distinguish features between the indigenous and the African-Americans.

Keywords: African-Americans, American Colonization Society, Liberia, politics, religion, education, economy.

Résumé

Le Libéria est le plus ancien pays indépendant en Afrique Ouest et l'un des pays les plus ethniquement diversifiés au monde. La population au Libéria se repartait entre les colons libériens et les groupes aborigènes. Le pays a été fondé en 1820 par la société de colonisation américaine comme un refuge pour les esclaves libérés revenant sur le continent africain. Les États-Unis n'ont reconnu le Libéria comme un pays indépendant qu'au 1862 durant la guerre civile américaine.

La présente étude adopte le fondement du Libéria et le gouvernement des afro-américains entre 1840 et 1900. Le premier chapitre contient le contexte historique du Liberia et ses aborigènes. Le deuxième chapitre traite l'étude du fondement du Liberia et son champ politique et son régime du gouvernement après l'indépendance. Enfin, le troisième chapitre se focalise sur les aspects de la société et de l'économie au Libéria. Ce pays est fondé grâce à l'abolition de l'esclavage à l'ouest. Depuis son indépendance, la société et la structure politique du Libéria ont été modelées presque de façon identique aux États-Unis.

Mots clés : Afro-Américains, American Colonization Society, Liberia, politique, religion, éducation, économie.

الملخص

ليبيريا هي أقدم بلد مستقل في غرب أفريقيا يرجع تاريخه إلى عام 1847، وهي واحدة من أكثر البلدان تنوعاً من الناحية العرقية في العالم. تأسست الجمهورية الليبيرية من قبل جمعية الاستعمار الأمريكية (ACS) عام 1820 عندما وصل العبيد السابقون (الأمريكيين الأفارقة) إلى شواطئها في محاولة لإعادتهم إلى موطنهم الأصلي في إفريقيا. لم تعترف الولايات المتحدة باستقلال ليبيريا حتى عام 1862 أثناء الحرب الأهلية الأمريكية. تم تقسيم السكان في ليبيريا بين المستوطنين الليبيريين ومجموعات السكان الأصليين. تتبنى هذه الدراسة البحث التحليلي لتتبع تأسيس ليبيريا وحكم الأمريكيين الأفارقة (1840-1900). يتناول الفصل الأول الخلفية التاريخية لليبيريا وسكانها الأصليين، بينما يحاول الفصل الثاني دراسة تأسيس ليبيريا ومجالها السياسي، دستورها، أحزابها السياسية ونظام الحكم فيها بعد الاستقلال. أما الفصل الثالث فهو يركز على جوانب المجتمع والاقتصاد الليبيري. إن إلغاء العبودية في الغرب كان خطوة نحو إنشاء ليبيريا,طبق هذا الأخير نظام حكم مماثل للنظام المعتمد الذي تم تبنيه في الولايات المتحدة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأمريكيون الأفارقة ، جمعية الاستعمار الأمريكية ، ليبيريا ، السياسة ، الدين ، التعليم ، الاقتصاد.

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List of Acronyms

ACS: American Colonization Society

RP: Republican Party

TWP: True Whig Party

General Introduction

The Republic of Liberia began as a settlement established by the American Colonization Society (ACS)for African-American freed slaves who carried their culture and traditions with them. In 1847, Liberia proclaimed self-governance and the settlers elected their first president J.J. Roberts, a wealthy free born from Virginia who settled in Liberia. He was succeeded by twelve presidents from the settlers and their descendants in the period between1847and1900. Their dream was to found a nation where they could live in peace and to prove to the world that they were capable to govern themselves.

The indigenous people expected that the Liberian leaders, who had been oppressed in the United States, would seek true democracy in Liberia. In fact, democracy was just a theory and was not really applied and this is one of the points what this work is about.

This research is based on an analytical approach to examine the foundation of the oldest republic in Africa, Liberia, and the African-Americans' rule in the period (1840-1900). This research thesis attempts to answer five main questions; How was the republic of Liberia founded? How was the African-Americans' ruling system? How did they act with the indigenous people who were less powerful than them? What were the impacts of their system on both economic and social levels? What was the reaction of the indigenous to that rule?

To answer the aforementioned questions, a collection of different sourceswas used to ensure the objectivity and authenticity of the research data. The motives behind the choice of this topic are the personal interests in African studies, a desire to highlight and introduce

an old republic in Africa which is Liberia, and the curiosity to discover the African-Americans'ruling system in Liberia.

This research includes three main chapters. The first chapter depicts the historical background of Liberia and its indigenous people and how it had been before it became a settlement. It also tackles the circumstances of the African-Americans'arrival to Liberia. Chapter Two examines the foundation of the Republic of Liberia, the political sphere in Liberia after independence. Finally, chapter Three examines the social and economic impacts of the African-Americans' rule on the indigenous people of Liberia. It also shows the reaction of the indigenous towards this way of ruling.

Much attention is paid to the evolution of lifestyles and cultural diversity in Liberia. African-Americans and their descendants played an unequal role in the development of many aspects of Liberian culture, including Christianity and Western style. Thus, a mixture of natives and foreigners produced a Liberian culture influenced by Westerners.

Lastly, in the conclusion, the major findings and implications of the study are put forward.

CHAPTER ONE:

Background to Eighteenth-Century Liberia

1.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the foundation of the country of Liberia by defining the historical and natural setting as well as the political reality that was prevailed in the period before and after the colonization. It also depicts the arrival of African-Americans on the Liberian shores.

1.2 Historical and Ethnic Profiles of Liberia

The name Liberia comes from Latin and means a free land, or land of liberty. Liberia was first discovered by the arrival of the Portuguese merchant ships in the mid-14th century through the Atlantic Ocean. Previously, it was called "the Pepper Coast", or "Melegueta[1]Pepper Coast" also known as "the Grain Coast". Liberia was divided into sixteen counties and inhabited by indigenous peoples from different tribes (Thompsell, 2019).

Liberia was found by the United States in 1820 when former slaves arrived on its coasts with the aim of being repatriated to Africa. It was founded as a settlement for African-Americans liberated in the 19th century. It was created by the ACS; an American organization which was predominantly Christian launched by abolitionists and freed blacks from America who wanted to return Africans to Africa where they thought they would have a better chance for freedom, relief, and a better life than in America. Liberia's declaration of independence was signed on July 26, 1847. Thus, Liberia became the oldest African republic in West Africa to achieve independence without rebellion or major

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1.Melegueta Pepper was a very important item in the West African trade.Aframomum melegueta is a species in the ginger family, Zingiberaceae, and closely related to cardamom. Its seeds are used as a spice (ground or whole); it imparts a pungent, black-pepper-like flavor with hints of citrus. It is commonly known as grains of paradise, melegueta pepper, alligator pepper, Guinea grains, ossame, or fom wisa. The term Guinea pepper has also been used, but is most often applied to Xylopia aethiopica (grains of Selim).

uprisings. It took fifteen years for the United States to recognize Liberia's independence during the American Civil War in 1862 (Ciment 13, 25).

The official language in Liberia is English with sixteen other native official languages as well including, Kpelle, Bassa, Grebo, Dan, Kru, Mano, Loma, and Mandingo. The capital city is called Monrovia and was founded by freed survivors of slavery from America. Initially called Christopolis, the city was renamed after the fifth President of the United States, James Monroe, who was in power when Liberia was established in 1820 (Thompsell, 2019). The history of Liberia is inextricably connected with that of the United States.

The Liberian people were divided into two major groups. The newcomers called themselves Freemen and the natives whom the former slaves called them Bushmen. Later, the newcomers became known as the Americo-Liberians (Sherman 12). Liberia was conceived as a homeland of liberated slaves. The colony prospered very quickly and Liberia gained its independence in 1847(Ouest-France, 2017).

1.3 Geographical Location

Liberia is a coastal African country which is situated in the equatorial region in western Africa, where a warm climate prevails with rains throughout the year. Liberia is opened to the Atlantic Ocean, bounded to the northwest by Sierra Leon, to the north by Guinea, and to the east by Côte d'Ivoire, covering 43,000 square miles (Sherman 11).

Map 1: Geographical Locationof Liberia
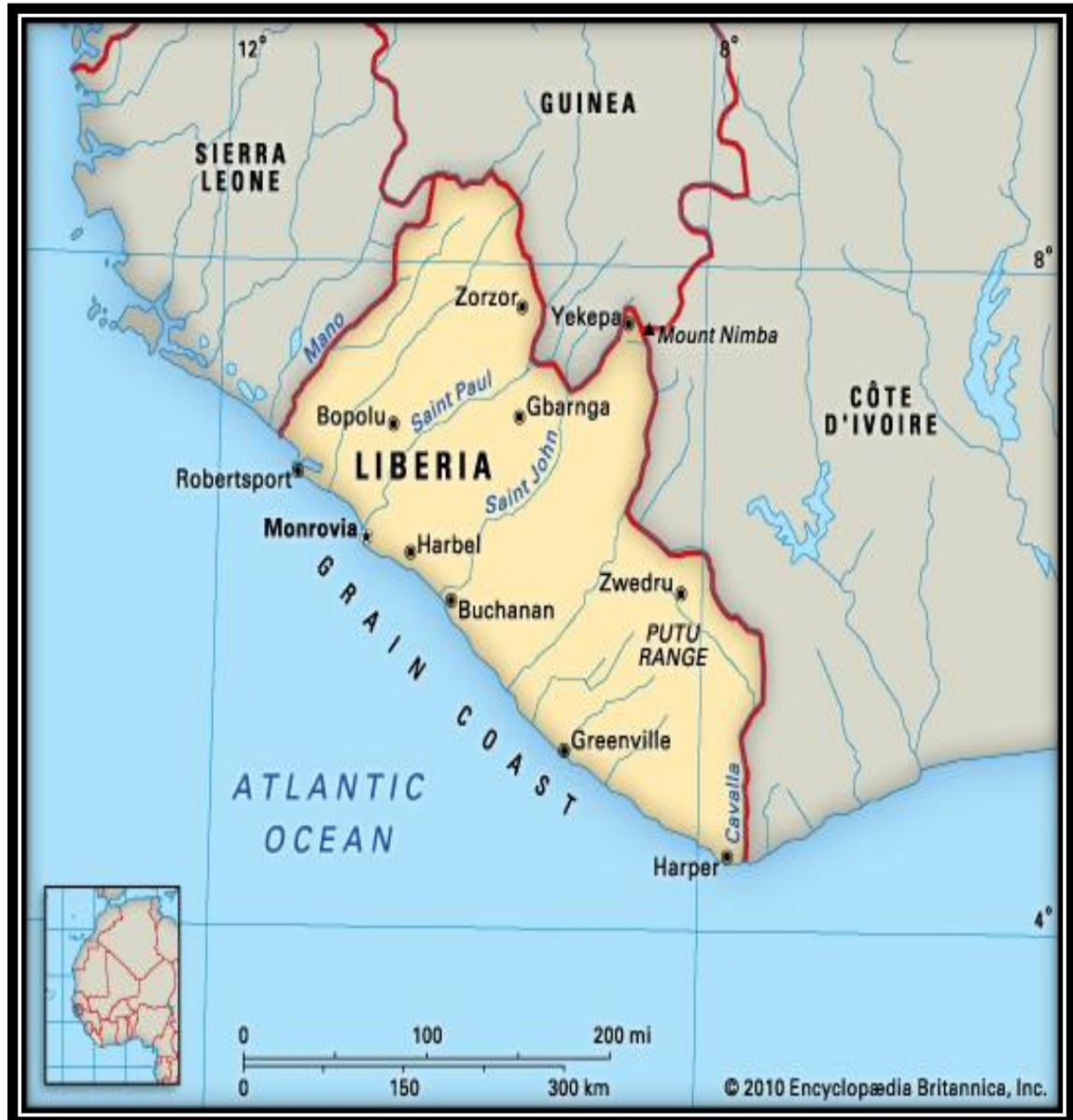
Source: kids.britannica.com/kids/assembly/view/64941

1.4 Ethnicities in Liberia

In the 14th century, the Liberian coasts were frequented by French sailors but they were not officially discovered until 1461 by the Portuguese who created trading posts, from where they exported pepper and gold from Guinea before embarking on the slave trade. The latter flourished between the 17th and the beginning of the 19th century (Ciment 28).

Liberia was inhabited by a large number of ethnic groups speaking several native languages. The indigenous ethnic groups consisted of the Bassa, Gio, Kpelle, Vai, Loma, Kissi, Gola, Gband, Dei, Krahm, Belle, Mende, Mandingo, Grebo, Mano, and Kru. They were organized in tribal areas in the form of chiefdoms. Each ethnic group had its own language and culture (Olukoju 9). Most of these ethnic groups believed in spirits, superstitions, and magic (Olukoju 61).These are some of the indigenous people who comprised the inhabitancy of Liberia (Olukoju 3). These sixteen groups of people were grouped into three predominant linguistic categories distributed geographically around the country:

a) **Mel languages:** composed of the Gola and Kissi tribes.

b) **Kruan:** was in the eastern part, and consisted of the Bassa, Bella, Dei, Grebo, Krahn, and Kru.

c) **Mende:** was in the western part, and included the Bandi, Gio, Kpelle, Loma, Mandingo, Mano, Mende, and Vai.

Liberia had been inhabited since 1300. The smaller ethnic groups including, the Bassa, the Gola, the Kissi, the Kru, and others were pushed towards the Atlantic Ocean to Liberia by Mende-speaking people and settled down in Liberia. These were part of the indigenous people who made up the population of Liberia. The decline of both the Mali

Empire in 1375 and the Songhai Empire in1591 exacerbated the forced migration of these ethnic groups. Internal desertification also had an important role in this migratory movement, pushing so many peoples to migrate to the coastal region, which would later become the pepper coast of Liberia (Sherman 13).

The indigenous newcomers carried on with them different proficiencies, including cotton thread, weaving; iron smelting, and rice and sorghum cultivation. They also proposed to the country social and political establishments of the Mali and Songhai empires. They had the same political and economic organization (Sherman 13). Directly after the Mano occupied the region, one more tribe, the Vai, was obliged to migrate. After the collapse of the Mali Empire, the Vai, who was an integral part of it, were forced to emigrate. They made an alliance with Mano and ended further Vai's influx. But the Vai was able to stay in the Grand Cape Mount[2] area that remains its homeland today. Grebo and the other ethnic group were pushed to the coastal region following the invasion of Mano (Sherman 14).

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[2] Grand Cape Mount is a county in the northwestern portion of the West African nation of Liberia. One of 15 counties that constitute the first-level of administrative division in the nation, it has five districts. Robertsport serves as the capital with the area of the county measuring 5,162 square kilometres (1,993 sq mi).

Map 2: Ethnicities in Liberia

Source: www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/liberia/people.htm

1.5   The Formation of the Colony

The social imbalance caused by the increasing number of the freed slaves in the American society, especially after the abolition of slavery in 1807, was the major reason that led the American government to establish an oversea colony, Liberia, in Africa. It was considered a suitable place to return them back to settle there.

1.5.1   The African-Americans' Arrival to Liberia

To return to Africa was a welcomed idea for the African-Americans who noticed that even after the end of slavery, they were not treated equally to the Whites. So, they totally believed that leaving the United States towards their mother continent was the solution to feel truly liberated.

1.5.2 The Origin of the African-Americans

African-American is a term which refers to those racial groups of American people who are the descendants of enslaved black African people. The enslaved Africans were brought unwillingly to the colonial America to work as servants and in plantations. This racial group is classified as the third largest one in the United States (Wikipedia, n.d)

During the 17th century, most of the enslaved men, women and children who were brought to America put their first step on Sullivan's Island, in South Carolina. Later, they were taken to different regions of the country. When the enslaved Africans were caught and shipped to America, they had to stay in a place called "Pest house[3]" waiting to be sold to the planters who were interested in increasing their labour force and their production (Wright 7).

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[3]A pest house, plague house, pesthouse or fever shed was a type of building used for persons afflicted with communicable diseases such as tuberculosis, cholera, smallpox or typhus. Often used for forcible quarantine, many towns and cities had one or more pesthouses accompanied by a cemetery or a waste pond nearby for disposal of the dead.

The African slaves came to America over one of two ways. First, it was from the West Indies. Shippers of merchandise used to bring relatively a small number of slaves with their Cargoes. Second, most of the captive slaves were brought forcibly to the North of America from Africa, precisely from the coast and interior land of West and West-Central Africa (Wright 12). Wright argued that the United States of America had required and carried 97 % of the 383,000slaves arriving in the North American mainland over 189 years of legal slave trading to the region (13).

In comparison to Whites and Indians who could not resist the harsh plantation environment, Africans were considered the best choice for the planters because they used to live and work under difficult conditions. In addition, they had been exposed to some epidemic diseases such as smallpox, mumps, measles, malaria and yellow fever, which enabled the survivors to have immunity toward such deadly diseases. This made them more suitable to be plantation workers. Besides, African slaves were more profitable. In a year, one African slave could produce an amount of sugar which could recover his price. For example, "An English planter on the Caribbean island of Jamaica in 1690 had to pay £20for a 'prime'male African, direct from Guinea. That laborer could produce about five hundred pounds of sugar in a year, which the planter could sell for £20, and thus in a year recover the original cost of the slave."(Wright 11).

1.5.3   Slave Trade

Transatlantic slave trade or Atlantic slave trade basically means the transportation of African slaves from Africa to the European colonies in the Americas through the Atlantic Ocean (see Map 3, p.13). During the 16th and 19thcenturies, the transatlantic slave trade reached its summit of prosperity. The three continents, Europe, North and South America and Africa, were parts of this profitable economic system. Most slave

ships were European and depended on exchanging some European products such as guns, ammunition and manufactured goods for enslaved people. The latter were exported to the Americas to work in plantation and in reverse, goods from the Americas, such as cotton, tobacco; sugar and rum were taken to the European markets (Eltis 1).

1.5.4 Slaves in Bondage

The relationship between slaves and their owners was unfriendly. The slave owners treated their slaves in a harsh way. For example, slaves used to work hard in plantations of cotton, and when they finally went where the cotton was weighed, they were severely punished if the cotton was less than the required amount. Each owner was free in using the way he punished his slaves. Some slaves were severely beaten while others were burned with hot iron, but the most common punishment was the flogging (figure 1, p.14). Sometimes, slaves were punished for no obvious reason. Some owners admitted that they used to punish their slaves just for pleasure while others sexually assaulted the slave women (Ukessays, n.d).

Slaves had no right to express the feelings of tiredness, sleepiness or discomfort. After their hard work in the plantation all the day, they had to do other activities in the evening, such as feeding the animals and collecting the fire woods. In return, they received too little food to eat and used to sleep few hours on blanks made of wood (UKessays, n.d).

Slave owners pursued a policy of subordination to make their slaves completely dependent on them. Therefore, slaves were deprived of education because their owners thought that slaves might ask for their rights if they became educated people. Due to the subordination policy, slavery lasted more than two centuries and half in the United States (Williams 2019).

By the 18th century, the American society witnessed some changes. Slaves started to reject the way they had been living and treated. Therefore, many slave revolts, conspiracies, rebellions and uprisings emerged on the scene as a reaction to the brutal treatment that slaves received from their owners. However, there is no agreement among historians about how many African-American revolts took place. Some identified about 250 slave revolts while others counted more than 300 ones. The most famous slave uprisings were the Stono-Rebellion[4] in 1739, the New York City conspiracy in 1741, German Coast uprising in 1811 and Nat Turner's Rebellion[5] 1831. However; these revolts were strongly opposed and suppressed either by the owners themselves or by the militia forces (Gates 2020).

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[4]The Stono-Rebellion (sometimes called Cato's Conspiracy or Cato's Rebellion) was a slave rebellion that began on 9 September 1739, in the colony of South Carolina. It was the largest slave uprising in the British mainland colonies, with 25 colonists and 35 to 50 Africans killed.
[5]Nat Turner's Rebellion (also known as the Southampton Insurrection) was a rebellion of black slaves that took place in Southampton County, Virginia, in August 1831, led by Nat Turner.

Map 3: TheTransatlantic Slave Trade from Africa to the Americas
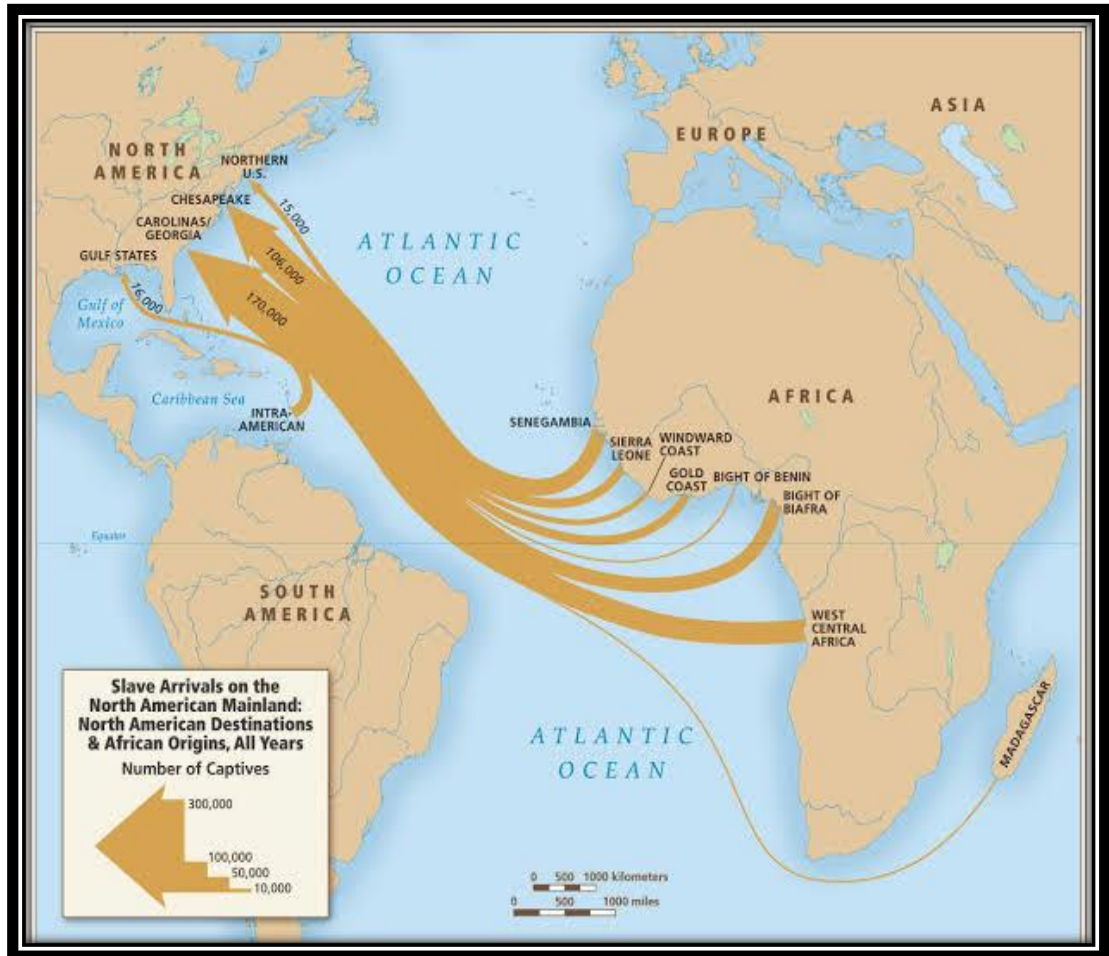
Source: www.withinthisskin.org/history-of-slavery/

Fig.1. Slave Torture

Source:"A Whiped Louisiana Slave." 1863. Wikipedia.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treatment_of_slaves_in_the_United_States. Accessed 12

Sep, 2020

1.5.5   The Abolition of Slave Trade

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, slave trade started to decline gradually. In 1807, the bill of slavery abolition was passed by the English Parliament. It was mainly due to the successful efforts of Clap ham Sect, which was a group of Englishmen who were totally against the idea of slavery. They believed and proved that the principles of Christianity were opposite to slavery practices (Hanciles 205).

Theoretically, the abolition of slavery was in 1807, but practically it was years later. Great Britain imposed naval blockades so as to oblige the other European nations to give up such inhuman trade. In fact, the abolition of slavery was not because of humanitarian motives only; it was for economic ones as well. The rise of the Industrial Revolution and the richness of the African countries in natural resources and raw materials led Britain to change her mind and legitimize commerce instead of slave trade (Galadima and Turaki 93).

In the United States, the abolition of slavery started in the Northern states with an Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery from Pennsylvania in 1780. It prohibited the importation of slaves to the state. Later, the other states passed legislation abolishing slavery. By 1790, all the northern states banned the transatlantic slave trade. In 1794, President George Washington signed the anti-slavery trade-act. In 1807, the American federal government criminalized the slave trade, and slavery became unconstitutional in 1865as a consequence of the Civil War (Wikipedia, 2020).

1.5.6 The Establishment of the Colony in Liberia

The abolition of slavery led to an increase in the number of freed slaves in the United States, especially in the North where the abolition was more effective than in the

South. Therefore, the southern slave owners were totally against the access of freed slaves to the South as a step to avoid troubles with their slaves.

In 1816, the American Colonization Society (ACS) was created and was welcomed by both the Whites and the enslaved people. Its main task was to resettle former slaves in their home continent, Africa. In 1820, the United States government established a tiny settlement in Cape Mesurado and appointed agents to control its execution. As more freed slaves arrived, the settlement expanded to include other neighboring areas (Temperley 67).

Prior to 1865, the ACS shipped about 11,228 African-Americans to Liberia, 460 from South Carolina alone. After the Civil War, a remarkable number of African-Americans showed their desire to emigrate to Liberia (see fig2 p.17). So, between 1866 and 1878, more than 720 freed slaves left the United States and settled in Liberia. However, many emigrants preferred to go back to the United States, and they complained about the bad living conditions and the death of the majority of the early settlers. This news made numerous freed slaves refuse to go back home to Africa. So, the United States restricted the process of manumission. Later, when the conditions became better in the colony, the process of resettling freed slaves in Liberia began to increase gradually (Falola & Essien36).

1.6 Conclusion

The African-Americans' first years in the colony were challenging. Later, when the conditions became better in the colony, the process of resettling freed slaves in Liberia began to increase gradually. Despite all the difficulties they faced, they determined to show the world that they could create and rule their own country.

Fig.2: The Deportation of Freed Slaves to Liberia after the Civil War in the USA
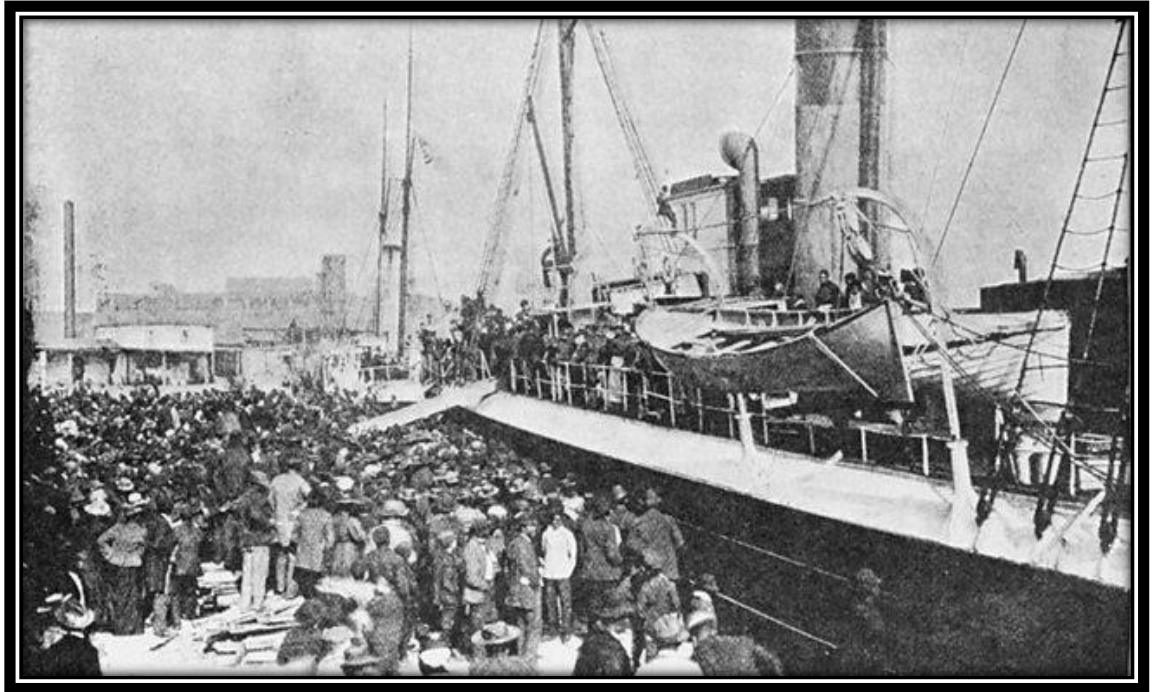
Source:"African Americans Depart for Liberia.", 1896. Wikiwand.

https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Back-to-Africa_movement Accessed 12 Sep 2020.

CHAPTER TWO:

African-Americans' Rule in Liberia (1840-1900)

1.1 Introduction

Liberia is one of the sovereign countries in the world that were founded by the ACS during the period known as the scramble for Africa by the European colonial powers. In the late 19[th]century, Liberia was an independent country. This chapter aims at examining how Liberia was granted its independence as well as evaluating the African-Americans' ruling system.

1.2 Liberia from a Colony to Independence

The idea of establishing colonies for freed slaves originally emanated from Britain when she decided to establish a colony in Sierra Leone in 1787, aiming to stop slave trade within Africa and its western coast as well. The United States emulated Britain's policy in founding a colony in Africa so as to solve some social problems at home, especially those of the freed slaves (Everill 2).

The ACS and independent state bodies with the support of the United States government founded a settlement on present Liberia. The main tasks of these societies were to secure land, organize emigration, send agents to the government of the colony and finance the supply of the first settlers with consumer goods (Gerdes 16).

First, the government could acquire by force a piece of land in Cape Mesurado, which later became Monrovia. For example, the chiefs of Sherbro Island refused at first to grant land to the colonists, but they were obliged by using force.Tribes in the neighbourhood contested the chief's right to grant land to the colonists, and they cooperated with each other to force the settlers to leave (Temperly 79).

But, the resistance of the indigenous people with traditional spears and knives did nothing in front of the colonists' muskets and canons. Within a few years, other settlements were established by the ACS and philanthropic bodies. At first, the management of the colony was under the society's authority as it was agreed in the Elizabeth Compact of 1820 by the first settlers. However, two years later, the settlers rebelled and asked for more privileges that would enable the elected officials from the body of the colonists to manage the daily administration affairs (Temperly 69).

By1839, a new Liberian constitution was drawn up. It was the constitution of the Commonwealth of Liberia. The first settlements, except Maryland, were united in one commonwealth (see map 4 below). The constitution stipulated that authority be shared between a locally elected council and a governor appointed by the ACS as what happened with Britain's former American colonies (Temperly 69).

The foundation of this commonwealth federation led to peaceable relations with the native tribes but to serious problems at the international level. When the supreme authority was in the hands of the ACS, the British government and the British traders rejected paying docking and customs duties imposed by the Liberian authorities (Prothero 11).

The United States which supported and defended the colonists in their struggles with indigenous Africans preferred at that time not to get involved in foreign conflict. So, the declaration of independence was viewed as salvation to the problem. In 1847, Liberia became an independent state under the name of the Republic of Liberia. Consequently, a convention was held to draw up a new constitution under the leadership of Samuel Benedict, a former slave from Georgia, and with the presence of delegates from each county (Temperly 69).

The new constitution was modelled on that of the United States, but it contained a number of important changes including prohibiting slavery, protecting women's property and restricting nationality. This constitution was approved through a popular referendum which was held on September 27, 1847. In October the same year, Joseph Jenkins Roberts, a free born black from Norfolk, Virginia, became Liberia's first elected president (Temperly 69).

In 1848, a treaty of Commerce and Amity was signed by Great Britain and Liberia (Prothero 11). Britain was the first country to recognize the Republic of Liberia, followed by other European countries, France and Portugal. However, the United States did not recognise the independence of Liberia until 1862 during Abraham Lincoln' residency because American leaders believed that the Southern states would not accept a black ambassador to Washington DC, the capital city of the United States (Prothero 11).

Map 4: The Commonwealth of Liberia
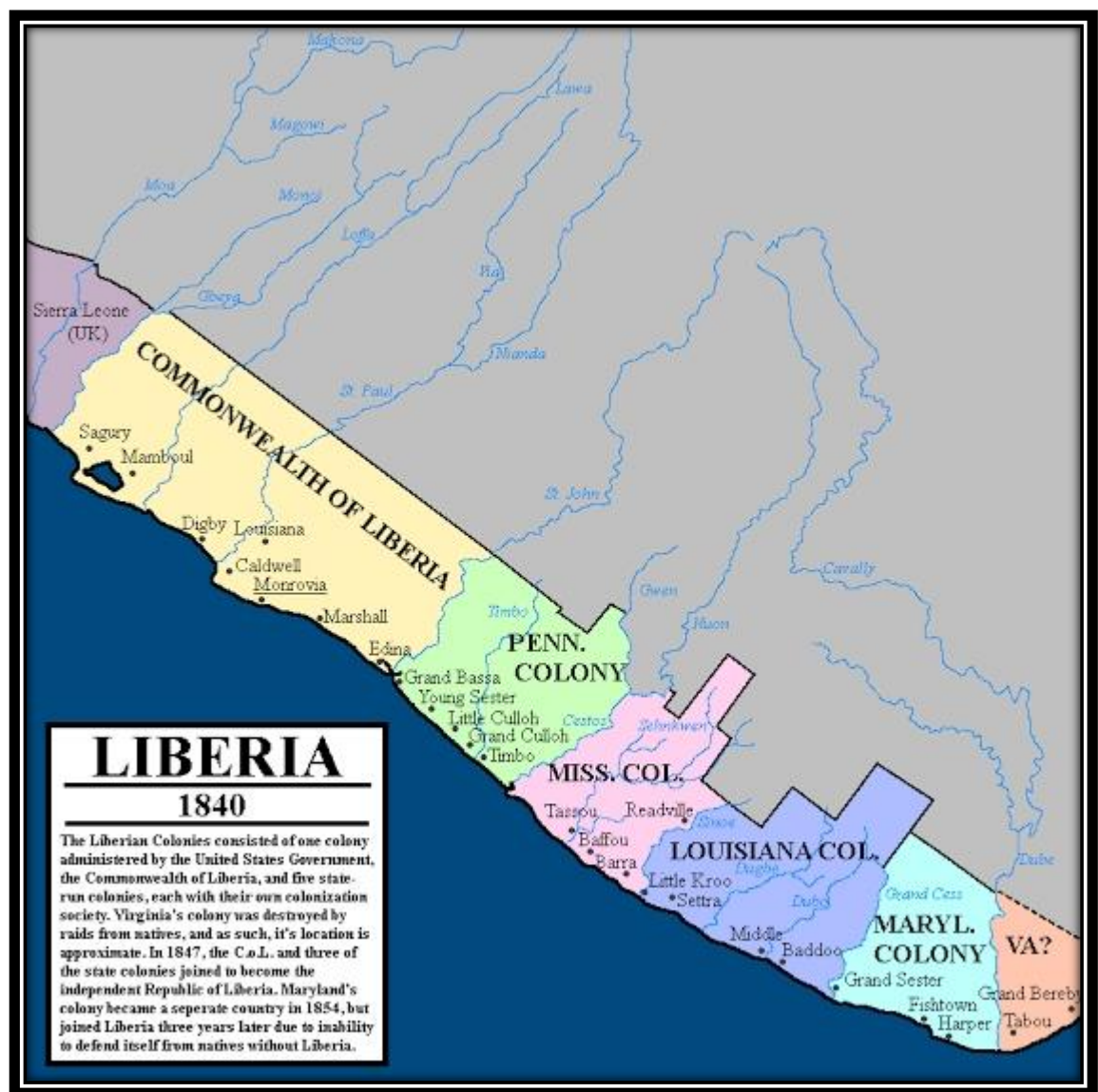
Source: www.pinterest.com/pin/488710997057654013/

1.3 The Political Sphere in Liberia after Independence

Immediately after independence, the small minority of black colonists and their descendants, known as Americo-Liberians, ruled the state with little to no participation from the indigenous, African-Liberians, and largely for their personal benefits. This fuelled the sense of superiority among them as a result of the idea that they were more civilised and cultured than the native people. The 1847 Liberian constitution was closely modelled on the United States one. It divided the political authority into three branches; the legislative, the executive and the judiciary (Prothero 20).

The legislative branch was conducted by an elected senate and a House of Representatives. Their fitness for election was based on residence, age, and possession of real-estate. The executive branch consisted of an elected president, a vice-president and other ministers. The Judiciary branch consisted of a Supreme Court and subordinate court (Prothero 20).

The presidential candidates should be at least thirty-five years old, live in the Republic for five years and possess property of a minimum value of 600 dollars (Prothero 20). The presidential term was limited to two years; the representatives of the legislative council were elected for two years and the senators for four years. Each county had two senators and the representatives were distributed according to percentage of population. The other officials of the government were appointed by the president with the approval of the senate's?(Ellis 214-215). Election was by ballot, and only male citizens of twenty-one years of age and those who owned a property qualification had the right of suffrage. Therefore, election was limited relatively to a small number of black American settlers, known as Americo-Liberians, and native people who adopted Liberian customs and traditions (Prothero 21).

Originally, Liberia was dominated by two political parties. The Republican Party (RP), formally known by the Liberian Party, and True Whig Party (TWP) (Ellis 220). The Republican Party was founded in Monrovia soon after the founding of Liberia in 1848. It was composed mainly of Americo-Liberians who had African and European ancestors. The leaders of the party were J. Roberts, Daniel Bashiel and James Spriggs. The main ideologies of the party were classical Liberalism[6], decentralization[7] and progressivism[8](Wikipedia n.d). Due to the fact that the first president of Liberia J. J. Roberts was one of the leaders of the Republican Party, the latter maintained political control from the first presidential election in 1847.It used its position of power to wither its opposition (Falola & Essien 44)

The second party was True Whig Party which was founded in1869 by wealthy the black Americo-Liberians in rural areas. The leaders of the party were Edward James Roye, Anthony w. Gardiner, and William Tolbert. The main ideologies of the party were black conservatism[9], centralism[10], and protectionism[11]. The TWP held political dominance when Edward James Roye was elected as president of Liberia in 1869. Although Roye was removed after two years laterand the Republicans returned to government, the Whigs got back into power from1878 until 1980 (Wikipedia n.d).

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[6]Classical liberalism is a political ideology and a branch of liberalism which advocates civil liberties under the rule of law with an emphasis on economic freedom.

[7]Decentralization is the process by which the activities of an organization, particularly those regarding planning and decision making, are distributed or delegated away from a central, authoritative location or group.

[8]Progressivism is a political philosophy in support of social reform.

[9]Black conservatism is a political and social philosophy rooted in communities of African descent that aligns largely with the conservative ideology around the world. Black conservatives emphasize traditionalism, patriotism, self-sufficiency, and strong cultural and social conservatism within the context of the black church. In the United States it is often, but not exclusively, associated with the Republican Party.

[10]Centralism is an idea on how to organize a state or government. The idea is to focus this organization under a single government instead of using many local government bodies. In many cases, this makes communication easier. An organization that is an example for centralism is the Roman Catholic Church.

[11]Protectionism is the economic policy of restricting imports from other countries through methods such as tariffs on imported goods, import quotas, and a variety of other government regulations.

1.3.1 The Americo-Liberian Oligarchy

Since its establishment in 1820 by the ACS, Liberia had been a destination for many freed slaves. The enormous number of the freed slaves who came and settled in the area led to its expansion. By1900, there were approximately 15,300 settlers. Most of them were from America and a few from the West Indies. Together they formed the Liberian settlements which composed four counties, Mesurado, Basa, Sino and Maryland, and a territory of Grand Cape Mount, all along the Atlantic Ocean (Ellis 214).

Before 1841, the Liberian settlements were run by White American governors who were appointed by the ACS with the assistance of a legislative council elected by the colonists and some Liberian officials. However, the final decision was in the hand of the Board of the Managers of the society in Washington, D.C. which was responsible for accepting, refusing or modifying laws made by the colony (Akpan 218).

It was not until 1840s that things started to change in Liberia. As the Society was remarkably suffering from lack of funds as well as from assault by the Liberians, who were strictly rejecting to be ruled by the White governors, its domination began to disappear rapidly. Moreover, a great number of white governors died because of deadly diseases such as smallpox, yellow fever, mumps and malaria. This made the ACS cede the management of the settlements' affairs to Liberian people, especially those who were asking for the autonomy of the colony. So, after the death of the last white governor, Thomas Buchanan, in 1847, J. J. Roberts succeeded him. Practically, the Liberians had taken the control over the colony years before they declared their independence in 1847. Consequently, most of the male settlers occupied high rank positions in the different bodies of the state, executive, legislative and judiciary, although they were illiterate and poor. But the real power was in the hands of the members of the leading and famous settlers' families (Akpan 219).

The settlers, who governed Liberia, had a little sentimental attachment to Africa. They were more Americans in their way of living than being Africans; their dress, food and houses were similar to those they had grown up into in America. They spoke English and practised Christianity. Even politically, they embodied the American political model which was based on an elected president, senate and a house of representatives (Falola & Essien 35).

1.3.2 The First President of Liberia Josef Jenkins Roberts

J.J. Roberts (1809-1876) a free born black from Virginia was the first and later the seventh president of Liberia. He was a descendent of a mixed couple ancestry, James and Amelia Robert. In fact, he had only one African grandparent. As a boy, he worked in his family's business on a flatboat transporting goods from Petersburg to Norfolk on James River (Joseph Jenkins Roberts).

As an outstanding figure in the history of Liberia, he had several achievements. In 1833, he was appointed High Sheriff of the colony. One of his responsibilities was to collect taxes and settle down any sort of rebellion on the side of settlers. A few years later, he was appointed as vice governor by the ACS. After the death of Governor Thomas Buchanan[12], J.J. Roberts became the first non-white man governing Liberia. Then, he worked to get the independence of Liberia through the legislature and maintained cooperation with the ACS. Indeed, His diplomatic skills and leadership helped him to perform effectively at both local and international levels (Joseph Jenkins Roberts).

12.Thomas Buchanan (November 19, 1808 – September 3, 1841) was an American who became a politician, the first official governor of Liberia. He was a cousin of James Buchanan, President of the United States. Buchanan served in the 1830s as the envoy of the American Colonization Society to the colony of Liberia, which it had founded on the coast in West Africa. He worked first as an administrator in Grand Bassa, later a county that named its seat as Buchanan in his honor. In 1839, Buchanan was sent to Monrovia. After the death of Jehudi Ashmun, a secretary of the ACS and top executive in Liberia, Buchanan was appointed as the first official governor of Liberia. He served from April 1, 1839 until his death on September 3, 1841.

In his first term as president, J.J Roberts sought recognition from European countries and the United States regarding the independence of Liberia. However, the United States did not recognise its autonomy until 1862 because the United States leaders' thought that black ambassadors would not be accepted by Southern states. In addition, J.J Roberts managed to expand the geographical territory of Liberia (Gardner 1092).

During Roberts'presidency, there was a progress in agriculture, shipbuilding and trade fields. Later, in the period between his first and second term in office, the economic situation of his country was deteriorating due to the political instability in government. He died on February 24th, 1876, less than two months after the end of his second term (Gerdes 24).

1.3.3   The Liberian Protectorate

At the beginning, the ACS acquired an area called Cape Mesurado where Monrovia was located, from the African chiefs so as to create a colony in Africa to settle the American freed slaves. Later, Liberia began expanding gradually all along the Atlantic Ocean and into the interior in search for fertile agricultural lands and to build new settlements. Besides, the settlers thought that by territorial expansion they would establish a powerful Christian nation, and thus they would extend their sphere of influence which would help them to trade and evangelise the Africans easily (Akpan 220).

Two main factors facilitated the expansion of Liberia. First, the financial and material supplies provided by the ACS were so useful and necessary to convince the African chiefs to give up their land for the benefits of the settlers. Second, the competition between the Liberian government and the British and French merchants was on the coast to acquire more land (Akpan 220).

Between 1842 and 1843, Governor Roberts was able to make the African chiefs sign amity and commerce treaties with the government of Liberia by which they put their lands under the Liberian authority. Similarly to what Governor Roberts did, the Governor of Maryland in Liberia made a trip across the Atlantic Ocean in 1864 so as to negotiate the amity and commerce treaties with African chiefs of the areas adjacent to Maryland colony, and they agreed on the annexation to Maryland. By December 1850, President Roberts succeeded in annexing Gallians, a district next to the British colony of Sierra Leone. So, Liberia's entire coastline became 600 miles from the San Pedro River on the east to the Sherbro River on the west (Akpan 221).

Methods followed by the Liberian Government to expand were totally different from those used by the European Colonial powers. Expansion was achieved through voluntary cession. The weaker tribes voluntarily ceded their lands to the Liberian government, and in return they benefited from its protection against the powerful ones (Akpan 221). The African chiefs sought the help of the Liberian government to establish trade and build schools in their territories. Sometimes, the Liberian government used force to acquire native lands, especially when they received aid from the American naval officers. In exchange for the protection and schools that the Liberian Government would provide for them, the African people were asked to submit completely to the Liberian government and laws. For instance, tribal disputes had to be referred to the Liberian authority to be resolved, preventing slave trade and avoiding war against one another (Akpan 221).

In the late of 1850 and after acquiring possession of the coastal areas, the Liberian government began to expand Liberia's "sphere of influence" over the hinterland which was rich in export products such as gold, cattle and ivory. In

1858, the region from the Bassa hinterland up to the Nimba Mountains was explored by a Liberian called George Seymour. From February 1868 to March 1869, Benjamin J.K Anderson explored the Dey, Gola, Condo, Loma, and Mandingo up to Cape Mesurado. In 1870, another expedition trip was undertaken under the leadership of a Liberian, William Spencer Anderson, who was able to hoist the Liberian flag in the Bar line country indicating Liberia's authority over it (Akpan 222).

The last Liberian expedition project was carried out from May to December 1874 under the leadership of Benjamin J.K. Anderson and his group. They had passed the countries of Kpelle, Vai, Gola, Loma, Mandingo and even Mesurado Anderson urged the Liberian government to build military posts in Kpelle, Loma and Mandingo because they were rich in the export products. So, Liberia's entire land was between 150 and 250 miles inland up to the River Niger (Akpan 223).

During the Scramble for Africa (1880-1890), the Liberian government recognised the necessity of establishing "effective occupation" over this territory through building military posts at strategic positions or other forms of its presence, such as building railways and highways, and settlements up to the banks of the River Niger and in unoccupied areas in the Liberian coast. By doing so, the Liberian territory would not be lost to France and Great Britain which were strong European colonial powers. However, Liberia could not keep its dominant. In 1882 and 1885 Britain succeeded to annex the Gallinas district and new Western boundaries were drawn between the British colony of Sierra Leone and Liberia. In 1891, France was able to put its hand on the littoral and a large hinterland up to the River Niger (Ellis 218).

Fig.3: The First President of Liberia Josef Jenkins Roberts (1809-1876).
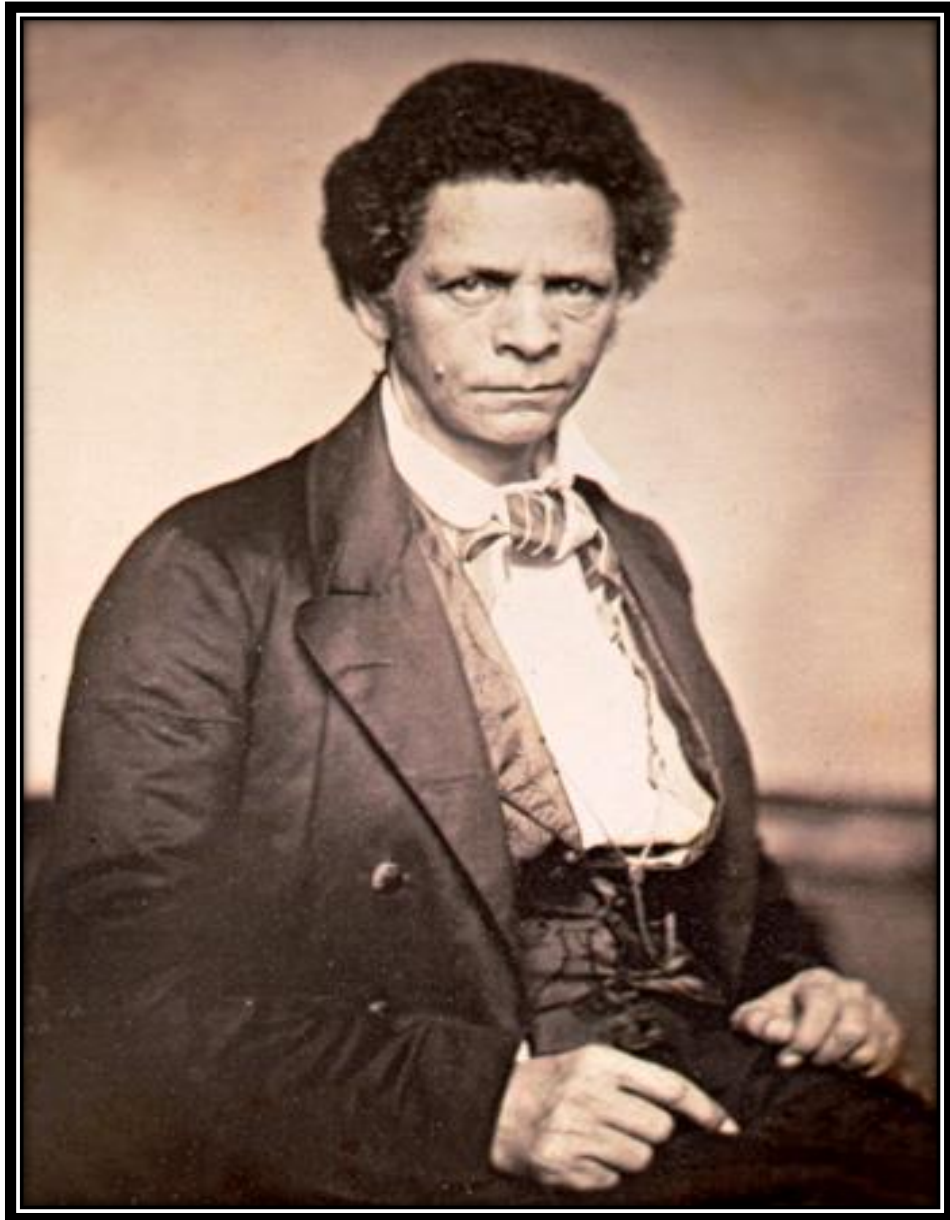
Source: "Joseph Jenkins Roberts." Wikipedia.
https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Jenkins_Roberts Accessed 09 Sep 2020

1.3.4   Liberia's Assimilation Policy

Before the Liberian settlers gained the political power in the 1840s, the ACS used to control the relationship between the settlers and the African people. According to the managers and the white governors, the settlers were merely a means to spread civilization and Christianity in the African society. Therefore, they established "civilized" settlements of African-American to facilitate the process of Christianization and civilization. So, this cultural assimilation of the Africans by the settlers became the "native policy" of the settlers themselves (Akpan 226).

The settlers' superiority complex made them think of cultural and political assimilation of the African peoples from the early 1840s as a way to replace the Africans' traditions, religious and political aspects by the western culture that they had brought with them. This process of assimilation was done in three main ways education, establishing African-American settlements and apprenticing the African youths in settler families. The Liberian settlers urged to educate the Africans in Liberian schools so as to receive the western political and cultural customs which would be a means to influence and success. The Liberian government established civilized townships where the Liberian settlers built churches and schools to ensure an ordered and cultural life. It also followed and supported the process of apprenticing. So, between 1845 and 1862, there were about 5000 Africans apprenticed to Americo-Liberian families (Akpan 227). They became much assimilated to the Liberian settlers' culture, speaking English, practicing Christianity and dressing like the settlers. This category was an effective and a useful link between the settlers and the African people (Akpan227).

Although the native population exceeded that of the settlers, they did not receive any political or citizenship rights from the Liberian government, except for some very small numbers of educated Africans in the early 20th century. In the 1870s, there were one or two representatives from kru or Bassa or Vai in the Liberian legislature. They had to pay delegates fee of $100 per a delegate to the Liberian government to designate them. But, in fact, they did not have an effective role in decision making because they were prevented from voting or influencing the government policy. The settlers were afraid that the Africans, who were more numerous than them, would overtake them politically and gain the control of the government (Gerdes 23).

Similar to political assimilation, cultural assimilation was not completely fulfilled either. The lack of funds and the decrease in the number of African-Americansmigrating to Liberia were two factors that prevented the Liberian government from establishing more schools or interior settlements. In addition, until the late 1870s, there was a bitter conflict between mulattoes[13] and the Blacks within the settler community which led to the distraction of the settlers' attention to the African peoples' issues. By the end of the 19th century, only the coastal areas, such as the Vai, Dey, Bassa, Kru and Grebo, were influenced by the settler civilization because they were in direct contact with them (Akpan 228).

By the increase of the scramble and partition, the Liberian government thought it was necessary to shift from plans for assimilation of the Africans to adopt the indirect rule in 1904. The hinterland was divided into districts ruled by district commissioners with the help of African chiefs (Akpan 228).

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[13] A Mulatto is a person of mixed white and black ancestry, especially a person with one white and one black parent.

1.4 Politics and Religion

Liberia had three religions, Islam, Christianity and traditional religion. The three dominant religions in Liberia did not escape politics. They were used as a tool for political conflicts. Poro[14] and Sandy[15] were the religious institutions of many indigenous peoples in the country. They were the ones who organized political relations and imposed social control over Liberian citizens even in the era of the Americo-Liberian's rule. No decision could be taken without the approval of Poro's chiefs. The Poro was much more than a religious institution; it exercised judicial powers such as the judgment of capital crimes and the enactment of appropriate sanctions. The Poro and the chiefdom institution worked hand in hand to manage these territories (Olukoju 37).

Manipulating religion was a ready-made weapon for politicians who lacked legality and who wanted to support their systems. Religious institutions and their employees were always chosen and integrated into the administrative structure of the country for political purposes. The church was the country's first ally, as it needed support to get through the hinterland of Liberia, to build more missionary schools. Nevertheless, the church did not always have good relations with the Liberian government. Grebo's uprisings against the oppressive regime were commissioned by the government at the instigation of Christian missionaries working with each other. As a result, the government became unwelcome to the missions and viewed their activities as undesirable. In order to express national unity, the missions were accused of promoting literacy by deleting the indigenous language and replacing it with English (Olukoju 37).

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[14]Poro society as defined in oxford dictionary means a secret society for men with rites of initiations, widespread in Liberia and Sierra Leone and exercising social and political power.

[15]Sande, also known as zadɛgi, bundu, bundo and bondo, is a women's initiation society in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea and the Ivory Coast. The Sande society initiates girls into adulthood by rituals including female circumcision. It is alleged by its supporters to confer fertility, to instill notions of morality and proper sexual comportment, and to maintain an interest in the well-being of its members throughout their lives.

1.5 Conclusion

Since their earliest years in Liberia, the settlers suffered from deadly diseases as well as the attacks of the indigenous people. The latter were displeased by the new arrivals, who tried to Christianize their society and to stop the slave trade, in which some ethnic groups were depended on. Regardless of these difficulties, the Americo-Liberians were able to show the world that they could build, generate and control their country after independence. In fact, they risked everything to find freedom and not to be run by any foreign person or organization. All these made the regime in Liberia repressive. Freedom of the press, speech, and association are values that were disregarded in Liberia, also corruption was widespread and the ruling True Whig Party refused to respond to the desires of the indigenous Liberians and deprived them of their political privileges.

CHAPTER THREE:

African-Americans' Influence on

Indigenous Liberians

1.1 Introduction

When the ACS withdrew its support, the economic conditions in Liberia worsened. Liberia made a desperate attempt to modernize its agricultural economy, but import costs were much higher than export earnings. This chapter examines the social and economic impacts of the African-Americans on the indigenous Liberians. It also shows the reaction of the indigenous towards the African-American's ruling system.

1.2 African-Americans' Influence on Indigenous Liberians

The African-Americans created a social replication of American society in Liberia, providing the new nation with the skills it needed to survive their Americanized way of life. They established homes, schools, and churches similar to those found in the southern United States. Traditional and cultural practices have an important role and continue to permeate many aspects of life in Liberia.

1.2.1   Social Influence

The Ancestors of the African-Americans who had been born in the United States before they moved to Africa had American cultural, religious, and social values that shaped their heritage (Jones, 2020). During the period of slavery in the United States, many African-Americans lost their African identity, including their tribal cultures. They became European Americans regarding culture and lifestyle. Besides, they were of mixed African and European descent, and therefore generally fairer-skinned than native blacks (Sherman 17).

The social situation of Liberians was divided between the minority which consisted of the descendants of African-American settlers and the native majority. These settlers

were people of all levels, from rich to poor (Sherman 26). The African-Americans were not ordinary black Africans and did not identify themselves as such, nor did the indigenous people accept them as African companions, or even as simple blacks, taking into account the fact that the new settlers were racially mixed (Sherman 27). Above all, the African-Americans absorbed the inevitability of religious superiority of the Protestant Christianity, as well as the cultural superiority of European civilization and the aesthetic superiority of the European individual. They created a social and physical embodiment of American society in Liberia, and preserved their American lifestyle, as they built houses and churches which were similar to those in the southern of the United States (Sherman28).

Indigenous African societies followed a traditional way of life and tried to adapt to the situation that prevailed during the domination of the settlers. The settlers established a system of military and administrative control over what was known as the "interiorzone" (The Advocates for Human Rights 54).

1.2.2 The Influence on the Level of Education

The initial apprenticeship of handicrafts, trade union systems, and other non-formal education systems complemented the formal school system in Liberia. Because of its strategic origins in the United States, Liberia was one of the earliest non-formal education universities in the 19th century (Olukoju 4). The main higher educational institutions were Cutton College in Harper and the University of Liberia in Monrovia. The University of Liberia was founded in 1862 as Liberia College at the time, and was then established in December 1851 under the law of the Congress (Olukoju 5).

1.2.3 Literacy in Liberia

The indigenous culture and literature of Africans educated in western Liberia was older than in any other country in West Africa. The main reason was that the African-

American settlers came from a literate society and then transplanted the American education and writing systems to Africa. However, some of the Liberian Muslim natives encountered an ancient tradition of scholarship in the Quranic educational system that accompanied Islam (Olukoju 42).

Islam was brought to Liberia through the Mandingo traders in the 18th century. When Muslim traders moved and settled in diverse places in Liberia to continue practising their commercial activities. They established good relationships with the indigenous peoples (Olukoju 42). The Muslim traders wanted to transmit their influence and the Islamic faith in Liberia through the establishment of Islamic institutions such as Quranic schools and mosques for worship, Arabic training, and religious education.

Islamic institutions were meant to introduce the Islamic faith and to teach Arabic alphabets to the local peoples, especially for the children (Olukoju 42). Within the curriculum of Quranic schools pupils were able to read, memorize, understand, and apply the various sections of the Quran (Olukoju 42). Good pupils were also expected to be proficient in translating the Quran into their native languages.

The American [16]Lutheran Church began its first African mission in Liberia in 1860 when it established the Liberian Lutheran Mission. It focused its efforts on Loma and Kpelle in central and north-western Liberia (Olukoju 28). The mission provided formal education and followed a literacy program for the rural communities in which it operated. It focused on evangelization and literacy in the native languages and later provided translations of the Bible in Loma and Kpelle so that people could worship God in their own languages.

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[16]Lutheranism is one of the major branches of Protestantism, organized as autonomous regional or national churches; it owes name and the interpretation of the Christian religion to Martin Luther and his 16th century movement that issued from his for reforms.

1.2.4   Religion

The Liberian religious culture is a blend of Christianity, Islam, and other traditional beliefs (Olukoiu 22). Civilization and culture were among the most important constituents that the colonists tried to preserve in order to impose their domination. Most African-Americans received religious education in religious institutions as the church played a major role in the life of most of them. One of the first settlers who arrived in Liberia, William Douglas, recounts his daily routine saying: "We worship God regularly twice a day and we also have a school that we attend daily at night" (Genesys 28).

Christianity was introduced to Liberia with the arrival of the African-Americans in 1820. The Liberian [17]Methodist Church was the dominant Christian denomination in Liberia, which was established with the coming of the first African-American settlers' in1822. First, the Methodists focused on the African-Americans, and then joined other Christian missions to venture into the hinterland of Liberia, where they established schools and churches in the region of Cape Palmas (Olukoju 28).

The commercial activities of the Mandingo traders or Dyula, the establishment of Islamic educational institutions, and intermarriage with non-Muslims were a blend of main factors that aided the spread of the Islamic faith in the Liberian hinterland (Olukoju 32). Islam served as a bond between merchants in an expanded regional trade network.

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[17]Methodism is an 18th-century movement founded by John Wesley that sought to reform the Church of England from within. The movement, however, became separate from its parent body and developed into an autonomous church. The World Methodist Council (WMC), an association of churches in the Methodist tradition, comprises more than 40.5 million Methodists in 138 countries.

1.3   Economic Influence

When Liberia declared its independence in 1847, it quickly gained diplomatic recognition from many European countries along the lines of the United Kingdom and France. For the emerging countries such as Liberia, economic and financial survivals were a major challenge (Gardner 1092). The Liberian economy lied in the potential wealth of Liberia, which was based on agriculture, forestry, fishing and various forms of indigenous industriesn, including basketry, mats, spinning, weaving, cotton dyeing, ironwork, pottery, and woodworking. Important commercial crops were coffee, cocoa, palm oil, palm seeds (palm fibers) (Sherman 56). Liberia's main economic sectors were growing food crops, especially rice and cassava, on small Liberian farms scale, in addition to iron ore mining and natural rubber production.

1.3.1   The Liberian Economy, Industry, and Natural Resources

The Liberian economy went through several stages, from primitive agriculture to the rubber industry, the exploitation of mineral resources, and even the provision of services. Liberia had trade contacts with other parts of West Africa and quickly started trading with the Europeans (Sherman56).

In his opening speech, Liberia's first president, Joseph Roberts, said that some people abroad feared that the citizens of Liberia, when thrown on their resources, were unlikely to support the government, and that anarchy would be the result of their independence. Proving these fears wrongly was a key objective of Liberia's early economic policies (Gardner 1092).

Roberts became Liberia's first non-white administrator in 1841, two years after the ACS granted self-governing powers to the Commonwealth of Liberia, a union of settler outposts along the coast. Settlers were immigrants from the United States and Barbados, as well as a small number of captives, or Africans freed from slave ships by the United States Navy. Those small coastal elites and their descendants dominated the economic and political institutions of Liberia (Gardner 1092).

In 1870, the competition between shipbuilding and steamship was very important in Liberia's economic field. In the same year, competition from Brazilian coffee and European sugar beets reduced exports from Liberia. Consequently, Liberia tried to reform its agricultural economy (Sherman 56).

1.3.2 Natural Resources

Liberia had significant natural resources such as gold, rubber, coffee, cocoa, cassava, palm oil, rice (the staple food of most Liberians) sugar cane, bananas, wood, and livestock. The country's exports were iron ore (the main source of foreign currency) gold, diamonds, cocoa, coffee, wood, and rubber. Imports include manufactured goods, chemicals, fuel, machinery, transportation equipment, and other foodstuffs (Olukoju 56).

The Liberian economy was mainly agrarian, and raw materials, equipment, and consumer goods are imported. Export production was carried out on a large scale thanks to foreign investments in rubber, forestry, and mining. Foreign vessels registered under the Liberian "flag of convenience[18]" have made Liberia one of the top countries in the world in terms of tonnage of vessels registered (Olukoju 7). Liberia nevertheless remained essentially agricultural. The distribution of wealth was uneven, with coastal districts

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[18] Flag of convenience (FOC) is a business practice whereby a ship's owners register a merchant ship in a ship register of a country other than that of the ship's owners, and the ship flies the civil ensign of that country, called the flag state.

receiving a greater share of economic benefits than the hinterland, after which administrative centres were the next beneficiaries (Olukoju 7).

1.3.3 Agriculture

Agriculture was one of the most important sectors for the Liberian economy. About half of its land was pitch-perfect for cultivation. The commercial farms were taken by foreigners, and the traditional ones with a large number of the population were cultivated using cutting and burning methods (Jones, 2020).

1.3.4 Finance

When Liberia was founded, Europeans conducted business with the country. During 1856-1864, European businessmen continued to escape Liberia's import and export duties which were carried out with the support of their governments. This practice put Liberia in a precarious financial position (Gardner 1093).

The issuance of the national currency was a part of the program of the new government of Liberia, so as to strengthening its powers, asserting its sovereignty, and extending its control to the expansion of trade in the region. The ACS encouraged the development of coastal trade, and many settlers preferred to have a comparative advantage as traders along the coast than to be farmers inland (Gardner 1093).

Liberia faced long-term financial problems, which complicated its national life. In response to industrial capitalism that began to replace the system of plantation around the world, enterprising Liberians resorted to trading. In the late 1860s, an impressive Liberian naval fleet developed but was quickly neglected by international competitors, which led Liberia's main economic establishment to access public employment in the absence of a

productive industry to generate funds for the bureaucratic dependence, an era of foreign lending began (Gardner 1092).

As their share of coastal trade declined, Americo-Liberians realized that they needed to increase the production of raw materials from home. In 1858, the Liberian Legislative Council approved the prize fund for the National Gallery in Monrovia (Gardner 1093). The awards rewarded innovations in agricultural production and processing. Early trade policies sought to protect the Liberian economy from foreign influences. The constitution established land ownership for Liberian citizens, and subsequent legislation restricted foreign merchants to a few entry ports. In particular, the British government complained that such policies were responsible for blocking trade and development in Liberia (Gardner 1093).

With the depreciation of the Liberian dollar exchange rate at the end of the 19th century, most of the British currencies flowed into West Africa due to the expansion of trade and the establishment of British colonies in the region. Since 1825, the number of silver coins entering the British colonies had increased. Although they had no gold support, they were the main means of foreign trade in British West Africa (Gardner 1097).

The return of the Liberian government to the capital market meant that the country began to collect income in pounds sterling. In 1899, the Liberian government negotiated a new agreement with its creditors. Starting in 1871, the three-year interest rate was reduced to 3%, increasing by 0.5% every three years, up to 5%, allowing the Liberian government to obtain another £100,000 in loans, worth 6% (Gardner 1098). At the end of the 19th century, the decline of the Liberian commodity market and the debt of a series of loans brought the economy down and hampered economic development.

1.4 The Reaction of the Indigenous Liberians towards the African-Americans' Ruling System

The African-Americans' settlers created a system of government that excluded indigenous Liberians from participating in the conduct of national affairs, on the basis that they were the pioneers of civilization and that the indigenous people were unqualified to be leaders (Sherman 17).

The native Liberians were inimical to the creation of the Liberian nation and had no role in making decisions about its internal system. According to the Liberian scholar Jeremy Levitt, "the Dei hated the presence of settlers and resisted by force to the establishment of a colony or sovereignty at Cape Mesurado elsewhere along the coast." The ACS and indigenous communities were in war on most lands (The Advocates for Human Rights 53).

The African-Americans believed in the racist concepts of the West, describing Africans as inferior peoples (Ballah 56). They took full advantage of the indigenous Liberians, seeing them as inappropriate humans to live with. Then, they isolated themselves from them by creating their own communities. This procedure laid the creation for a policy of political and economic omission of the indigenous Liberians from the country's affairs, a situation that would later cause a civil strife (Abrokwaa 56).

With an iron fist, the African-American political party, the True Whig Party, ruled Liberia and kept indigenous populations isolated from both political participation and socio-economic growth for over a hundred years. The True Whig Party met with no opposition as it was the only legalized political party in Liberia. However, it is necessary to mention that the native Liberians vigorously opposed their persecution, as did the freed slaves who also opposed slavery in America (Abrokwaa 59). As noted by Omonijo:

"History has been largely silent on the heroic resistance by the local population to the new system of overlordism. At various times, the indigenous Liberians fought their new rulers who had succeeded largely, in robbing them of their political rights" (p.12).

Most of the initial resistance was from the Kru, Gola and Grebo ethnic groups, who bravely resisted and prevented African-American territory from expanding into the country. When the Americo-Liberians started to overwhelm Liberian society, the native Liberians failed to keep their houses and fortunes. Moreover, the government adopted the Hat Tax Law, on which native people were required to pay taxes on any property they possessed, a law which only strengthened resistance against the government (Abrokwaa 59).

1.5 Conclusion

The proclamation of Liberia as a Christian country along the lines of the United States automatically co-opted the Church into the objectives of colonization and domination. Liberia was born on the shoulders of freed slaves from the United States of America who settled in the country from 1820 and proclaimed the independence of their country in 1847, but their monopoly on power and ignorance of the interests of the indigenous peoples who constituted the majority, led to a series of unrest and armed clashes inside the country.

General Conclusion

Liberia, the land of freedom, was initially a colony founded by the American Colonization Society which took a piece of land in West Africa to resettle former slaves therein. This initiative was adopted to avoid the freed slaves' rebellions against the white Americans as they were not treated as equal to them.

The African-Americans came to West Africa seeking freedom, equality and justice. Their dream was to found a nation where they could live in peace with no intervention in their way of living and ruling. However, they applied a system of racial segregation against the indigenous people of Liberia similar to that imposed on them in the United States. Although Liberia is considered an old republic in West Africa and one of the sovereign countries in the world during the Scramble for Africa, the natives could not feel themselves as independent people.

After Liberia's independence from the United States in 1847, the African-Americans seized the opportunity to rule the country. They adopted the same political system of the United States, with a similar constitutional framework and political parties. They also ruled the country with a little or no participation from the indigenous side, thereby acquiring more privileges and rights than the natives of Liberia.

There is no doubt that racism has the power to destroy not only individuals, but societies and nations as well. In the United States, racism was based on a superior-inferior relationship between Blacks and Whites in terms of racial differences. However, in Liberia this superior-inferior relationship was rather a cultural one in that the African-American settlers considered themselves as culturally superior to the natives. This resulted in a

constant conflictual relationship between the two groups which would affect all walks of life, particularly politics and economy.

The nature of the human behavior is very often transmitted from generation to generation, a feature that the African-American settlers in Liberia had long demonstrated through their attitude vis-à-vis the Liberian natives. This dissertation an attempt to follow the evolution of Liberia since its foundation by the ACS in the first decades of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth, with a view to examining the nature of the relationships that governed the attitudes of the Americo-Liberians to the natives of Liberia. The former's quest for freedom and dignity seemed to have replicated the same white American superior-inferior dogma with regard to racial relationships in their new home, Liberia, rather emphasizing the cultural element.

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Appendix

Table 1: Political History of Liberia

Date	Political History in Liberia (**1822-1900**)
1820	Liberia was founded as a settlement for freed African - Americans.
1839	New Liberian constitution drawn up.
1847	- Declaration of independence of the Republic of Liberia. - A convention was summoned to draft a new constitution. - J. J. Roberts became Liberia's first president.
1848	The Republican Party was founded.
1848-1849	Recognition of the republic by most of the great powers.
1850	The Liberian expansion into the hinterland.
1857	Annexation of Maryland by Liberia.
1862	Recognition of the republic by the United States.
1866	A significant number of freed men from South Carolina and Charleston, left for Liberia.
1869	The foundation of the **True Wigh Party**.
1878	The **True Wigh Party** dominated Liberian politics till 1980.
1882-1885	New western boundaries were drawn between the British Colony of Sierra Leone and Liberia.
1891	Frontier Agreement with France.

Table 2: The Presidents of Liberia in Chronological Order (1848 -1900)

Presidents of Liberia from 1840 to 1900	Term of Office
1- **Joseph Jenkins Roberts:** born in Virginia, USA, first president of Liberia, was elected six times.	1847-1856
2- **Stephen Allen Benson:** born in Maryland, USA, was elected four times.	1856-1864
3- **Daniel Bashiel Warner:** born in Maryland, USA, was elected twice.	1864-1868
4- **James Spriggs Payne:** born in Virginia, USA, was elected twice, 2nd term (1876-1878).	1868-1870
5- **Edward James Roye:** born in Ohio, USA, was elected once, was the first president who was deposed in coup d'état, he was assassinated.	1870-1871
6- **James. S. Smith:** (vice-president), completed Roye's term, born in South Carolina, USA.	1871-1872
7- **Joseph Jenkins Roberts:** the first and seventh president of Liberia.	1872-1876
8- **James Spriggs Payne:** born in Virginia, USA	1876-1878
9- **Anthony William Gardiner:** born in Virginia, USA, was elected three times, first president who resigned.	1878-1883
10- **Alfred Francis Russell (Vp):** completed Gardiner's term. Was born in Kentucky, USA.	1883-1884
11- **Hillary Richard Wright Johnson:** first Liberian president born in Africa (of American parents), was elected four times.	1884-1892
12- **Joseph James Cheeseman:** born in Edina, Grand Bassa County, Liberia, was elected three times, first president who died in office.	1892-1896
13- **William David Coleman (Vp):** completed Cheeseman's term. Born in Kentucky, USA, was elected twice, second prisedent who resigned.	1896-1900

Source: Liberia: " Past & Present of Africa's Oldest Republic" (Dr. Fred P.M van der Kraaij)

African-Americans' Rule in Liberia (1840-1900)

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Abstract

Liberia is the oldest independent country in Africa dating back to 1847, and it is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world. The main division has traditionally been between the settler-Liberians and the sixteen identified groups of indigenous people. The country was founded by the American Colonization Society of America when former slaves arrived at its shores in an effort to be repatriated to Africa. It took the United States fifteen years to recognize Liberia's independence, during the American Civil War (1861-1865). Liberia's declaration of independence was issued in 1847, thus making it the oldest modern African republic. The Liberians managed to keep and maintain their independence during the European colonial era. This dissertation attempts to trace back the establishment of the Republic of Liberia and the African-Americans' rule from 1840 to 1900, following an analytical approach.

The first chapter is devoted to a historical background to Liberia and its natives. Then, the second chapter attempts to examine the foundation of Liberia and its political sphere after independence. Finally, the third chapter focuses on some aspects of Liberia's society and economy.

After the process of analyzing the data collected from the different sources, we found out that the abolition of slavery in the West was a step towards the establishment of Liberia. The latter applied a similar ruling system to that adopted in the United States. i.e. the society and political structure of Liberia had been modelledalmost identically to the United States. Eventually, these lead to distinguish features between the indigenous and the African-Americans.

Keywords: African-Americans, American Colonization Society, Liberia, politics, religion, education, economy.

الملخص

ليبيريا هي أقدم بلد مستقل في غرب أفريقيا يرجع تاريخه إلى عام 1847، وهي واحدة من أكثر البلدان تنوعاً من الناحية العرقية في العالم. تأسست الجمهورية الليبيرية من قبل جمعية الاستعمار الأمريكية (ACS) عام 1820 عندما وصل العبيد السابقون (الأمريكيين الأفارقة) إلى شواطئها في محاولة لإعادتهم الى موطنهم الأصلي في أفريقيا. لم تعترف الولايات المتحدة باستقلال ليبيريا حتى عام 1862 أثناء الحرب الأهلية الأمريكية. تم تقسيم السكان في ليبيريا بين المستوطنين الليبيريين ومجموعات السكان الأصليين. تتبنى هذه الدراسة البحث التحليلي لتتبع تأسيس ليبيريا وحكم الأمريكيين الأفارقة (1840-1900). يتناول الفصل الأول الخلفية التاريخية لليبيريا وسكانها الأصليين، بينما يحاول الفصل الثاني دراسة تأسيس ليبيريا ومجالها السياسي، دستورها، أحزابها السياسية ونظام الحكم فيها بعد الاستقلال. أما

الفصل الثالث فهو يركز على جوانب المجتمع والاقتصاد الليبيري. إن إلغاء العبودية في الغرب كان خطوة نحو إنشاء ليبيريا,طبق هذا الأخير نظام حكم مماثل للنظام المعتمد الذي تم تبنيه في الولايات المتحدة.

الكلمات المفتاحية : الأمريكيون الأفارقة ، جمعية الاستعمار الأمريكية ، ليبيريا ، السياسة ، الدين ، التعليم ، الاقتصاد.