

# LIBERIA AND THE ATLANTIC WORLD IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY: CONVERGENCE AND EFFECTS

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## I

William C. Burke, an African American emigrant in Liberia, wrote the following to an acquaintance in the United States on 23 September 1861:

This must be the severest affliction that have visited the people of the United States and must be a sorce [sic] of great inconvenience and suffering and although we are separated from the seane [sic] by the Atlantic yet we feel sadly the effects of it in this country. The Steavens not coming out as usual was a great disappointment and loss to many in this country.<sup>1</sup>

Burke's lamentation about the impact of the American Civil War on the distant Atlantic shores of Africa underscores a problem—and opportunity—in Liberian historiography. Burke's nineteenth-century world extended past the distinct national boundaries that separated the United States and Liberia. Geographically, this was the vast littoral of the four continents—Africa, Europe, North America, and South America—abutting the Atlantic Ocean. But the Atlantic world, as historians now dubbed this sprawling transnational zone, was much more extensive. Societies near and faraway were also

<sup>1</sup>Bell I. Wiley (ed.), *Slaves No More: Letters from Liberia, 1833-1869* (Lexington, 1980), 211.

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drawn into the web of socioeconomic activities in the basin. The creation of the Atlantic world spanned almost four centuries, from the late fifteenth to the waning decades of the nineteenth century. In this period, an unprecedented multitude of migrants crisscrossed the Atlantic creating a vast network. For example, by the nineteenth century, regular transatlantic packages such as the *Mary Caroline Stevens* whose delay Burke called “a great disappointment,” transported passengers, provisions, and dispatches between the United States and Liberia. In an 1863 correspondence, Burke expressed gratitude to an “Excellent Friend” for locating his sister in Virginia and was “gratified in receiving a letter from her.”<sup>2</sup> Likewise, Liberian-owned commercial vessels traversed the Atlantic basin and disembarked at African and European ports with sugar, coffee, camwood, and palm oil, among others, in exchange for African produce and European manufactures. Ships from the European side of the Atlantic—Dutch, English, and French—made customary calls to Liberian ports as well. They unloaded pickled and dried fish, textile, metal, wine, and utensils and returned with African cargo.<sup>3</sup> Similar exchanges occurred throughout the Atlantic world, linking the four continents into one giant network of commerce.

Historians view such interconnectedness as unique, and consider it a defining feature of the Atlantic world. For instance, in his 1999 article, David Eltis characterized the Atlantic world as the original “hemispheric community” whose inhabitants held

values that if they were not shared around the Atlantic were certainly reshaped in some way by others living in different parts of the Atlantic basins and [...] where events in one small geographic area were likely to stimulate a reaction [...] thousands of miles away.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup>*The African Repository* (hereafter AR) 40 (1864), 5.

<sup>3</sup>Wiley, *Slaves No More*, 236-37, 83, 175, 137, 190; AR (1864), 269-70; Dwight Syfert, “The Liberian Coasting Trade, 1822-1900,” *Journal of African History* 18 (1977), 217-35; Dwight Syfert, “The Origins of Privilege: Liberian Merchants, 1822-1847,” *Liberian Studies Journal* 6 (1975), 109-28.

<sup>4</sup>David Eltis, “Atlantic History in Global Perspective,” *Itinerario* XXIII, 2 (1999), 141.

This common bound was precisely what Burke alluded to above. In typical communal fashion, he grieved over the pain Americans endured because of the Civil War and then expressed his empathy: "Although we are separated from the seane [sic] by the Atlantic yet we feel sadly the effects." The notion of an "Atlantic community" knitted by "common interest," was thrust into the spotlight during the First World War when an American journalist used the expression to prod a reluctant United States into joining the conflict in support of its transatlantic allies, namely, Britain and France. "We must recognize," wrote Walter Lippmann, "that we are in fact one great community and act as members of it."<sup>5</sup> Some decades later, scholars and academics debated the merits of an "Atlantic community." By the 1970s a consensus had emerged. Indeed, Atlantic societies were divided by myriad ethnicities, cultures, and interests. Yet, they were bound by a set of core ideas.<sup>6</sup>

Atlantic civilization has evolved as a distinct subfield of historical inquiry. Its analytical tool, Atlantic history, employs a multi-disciplinary approach to reconstruct the social history of the multicultural and multiethnic populations that inhabited the region. Much of the methodology employed by Atlanticists has been refined over the years by world historians, who are wont to studying culturally diverse populations. The world history paradigm rests on the fundamental notion that history constitutes layers upon layers of intricate interrelationships. The interconnectedness represents the "totality" of the human experience at any given time and space. Thus, by focusing on the intersections or the "region of intercommunication," one can discern changes and continuities over the long term.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup>Bernard Bailyn, *Atlantic History: Concept and Contours* (Cambridge MA, 2005), 7.

<sup>6</sup>For more on the origins, definition and methodology of Atlantic history, see Alison Games, "Teaching Atlantic History," *Itinerario* XXIII, 2 (1999), 162-73; Timothy J. Shannon, *Atlantic Lives: A comparative Approach to Early America* (New York, 2004), 1-5; Horst Pietschmann (ed.), *Atlantic History: History of the Atlantic System, 1580-1830* (Göttingen, 2002); Alison Games, and Adam Rothman, *Major Problems in Atlantic History* (Boston, 2008), Chapter One; Thomas Benjamin, *The Atlantic World: Europeans, Africans, Indians and Their Shared History, 1400-1900* (New York, 2009), Introduction.

<sup>7</sup>See, for example, William H. McNeill, "The Changing Shape of World History," in: Ross E. Dunn (ed.), *The New World History: A Teacher's Companion* (Boston,

The world history model of convergence has generated an impressive body of research in Atlantic history; it ranges from economic and political to quotidian customs like foodways, identity formation, and religious practices.<sup>8</sup> This is exactly where the problem (and opportunity) lies in Liberian historiography. Although Liberia was part of the Atlantic world (as will be further demonstrated in the following pages) its historiography has yet to be systematically integrated into the Atlantic model. The adoption of the Atlantic model could provide insight in unexplored areas and clarify some existing interpretations. This is especially relevant for studies about the multifaceted interrelationships between Liberia's emigrant and indigenous population and their respective interaction with the environment.

This culture mixing or creolization has received significant attention in Atlantic studies.<sup>9</sup> In the United States, for instance, enslaved Africans learned to speak English and practice Christianity, just as their white masters came to relish African cuisine introduced by their enslaved cooks. "Sesame seeds and oils, as well as red pepper," writes Genovese, "came from Africa with the slaves and became central to southern cooking."<sup>10</sup> With death looming in 1826, ex-president Thomas Jefferson seemed to anticipate his passing when he wrote of departing "to my fathers." Mechal Sobel wondered whether

2000), 146-60; Eric R. Wolf, *Europe and the People without History* (Los Angeles, 1982), esp. 3-9; Ross E. Dunn, *The Adventures of Ibn Battuta: A Muslim Traveler of the 14th Century* (Los Angeles, 1986), 7-8.

<sup>8</sup>E.g., James Axtell, *The European and the Indian: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America* (Oxford, 1981); Nicholas Canny, and Anthony Pagden (ed.), *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (Princeton NJ, 1987); Philip D. Curtin, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex: Essays in Atlantic History* (New York, 1990); Ira Berlin, "From Creole to African: Atlantic Creoles and the Origins of African-American Society in Mainland North America," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 53 (1996), 251-88; David Buisseret, and Steven G. Reinhardt (ed.), *Creolization in the Americas* (Arlington TX, 2000).

<sup>9</sup>E.g., see previous note; David Northrup, "Becoming African: Identity Formation among Liberated Slaves in Nineteenth-Century Sierra Leone," *Slavery and Abolition* 27 (2006), 1-21.

<sup>10</sup>Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York, 1976), 542; Mechal, Sobel, *The World They Made Together: Black and White Values in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (Princeton NJ, 1989); also, Buisseret and Reinhardt, *Creolization*, 3-5.

the dying Jefferson may have acquired the idea of immortal celestial relatives from his black chattels at Monticello, whose religious and funerary rituals white Virginian were all too familiar with.<sup>11</sup>

Research has also demonstrated that settlers in the Atlantic world learned to subsist on “native” foods, particularly when their flora and fauna withered in alien climates. Faced with starvation, migrants in the Atlantic world adapted local diets. The first English settlers in Jamestown, Virginia, took lessons from the Algonquian Indians on how to cultivate and prepare corn, the “Salvage trash.”<sup>12</sup> Similarly, when the all-important Eurasian wheat succumbed to Jamaica’s tropical heat, British soldiers used the local cassava as a substitute for wheat flour. According to one source, it was “workable into oatcakes similar to those of Scotland.”<sup>13</sup> These accounts revealed more than how, for example, Americans came to acquire the taste for popcorn. For one, they demonstrate the decisive role of environmental forces and how it altered the social behavior of settler societies. Much more important, however, the anecdotes reveal an important truism. European settlers in the Atlantic world were just as susceptible to “native” influences as the latter were to the so-called “civilizing” mission early Europeans promoted. In other words, cultural influence flowed both ways, that is, from the settlers as well as the indigenous people.

The archives show that Liberia’s black American emigrants also underwent creolization. “In regard to vegetables,” Burke recounted, “those that we have in the United States do not thrive so well in Africa. [...] We have a vegetable known by the name of eddoe, or tania very much like our Irish potato, a very excellent breadstuff.”<sup>14</sup> Without the resources to purchase expensive home provisions, poorer immigrants like Burk readily adopted local foods. During his visit to Liberia, American missionary Dr. James Hall, recalled the difference in the provisions of rich and poor Americo-Liberians—as the black Americans preferred to be called. He noted that “imported

<sup>11</sup>Mechal Sobel, *The World They Made Together*, 235.

<sup>12</sup>Cited in Axtell, *The European and the Indian*, 292.

<sup>13</sup>Buisseret, and Reinhardt, *Creolization*, 21; see also Alfred Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (Westport CT, 2003), 65.

<sup>14</sup>Wiley, *Slaves No More*, 206.

items of diet” such as “Irish potatoes” appeared regularly on the dining tables of the well-to-do Americo-Liberians, while African foods like “palm oil was only used by the poorer classes.”<sup>15</sup> The distinction transcended foodways. Several sources indicated that although wealthy Americo-Liberian traders, the “merchant princes,” constructed elaborate one- and two-storey homes in the tradition of southern antebellum architecture, the poor “form the body of their houses of logs” and “bamboo.”<sup>16</sup> Burke described the new rough and ready home he built for his family of six as “22 by 13 feet.”<sup>17</sup>

These archival accounts raise some new questions regarding the relationships between settlers and indigenes. How, for instance, did the American strangers learn to cultivate tania, a tropical crop that was utterly unknown to them? Or how did the newcomers acquire the expertise for building in the alien African environment—what logs and bamboo to use, for example? Obviously the local peoples provided the indigenous knowledge. Yet, relationship between the two is often viewed in the context of assimilation, that is, “natives” adopting Western values. An instance of the give-and-take is the Liberian English, presently, the lingua franca. Liberian English is a hodgepodge of African and English words invented by the Americo-Liberians and indigenes to facilitate communication between the strangers.<sup>18</sup> Considering these illustrations of convergence, can one truly speak of “assimilation of natives” without the assimilation of the immigrants? Studies in Atlantic history speak instead of acculturation, a bilateral process of cultural influence. Equally, does the linear theme of antagonism that has become received wisdom in the historiography fully describe the relationship between the Americo-Liberians and indigenous Africans?<sup>19</sup> The Atlantic model with its

<sup>15</sup>AR (1886), 7.

<sup>16</sup>AR (1857), 170; AR (1857), 110; AR (1882), 58, 26; *African Repository and Colonial Journal* (hereafter AR and CJ) (1836), 21. Also Svend Holsoe, and Bernard Herman (ed.), *A Life and Land Remembered: Americo-Liberian Folk Architecture* (Athens GA, 1988).

<sup>17</sup>Wiley, *Slaves No More*, 257, 191.

<sup>18</sup>John V. Singler, *An Introduction to Liberian English* (East Lansing MI, 1981).

<sup>19</sup>Some of the best analyses of Liberia class structure are J. Gus Liebenow, *Liberia: The Evolution of Privilege* (Ithaca, 1969); Amos Sawyer, *The Emergency of Autocracy in Liberia, Tragedy and Challenge* (San Francisco, 1992); M.B. Akan, “Black

focus on convergence reveals that the interrelationships tend to be multi-dimensional, conflicts as well as cooperation.

Finally, the notion that cultural influence was linear, flowing solely from the American side of the Atlantic, is reflected in other areas of Liberian studies. It is generally assumed that Liberia's 1847 constitution, with its rhetoric of "natural and inalienable rights," was the personal handiwork of a white American, Harvard law professor Simon Greenleaf. This assumption was strongly challenged in the 1980s in a little known article by Robert Brown. Among other contested points, Brown contended that Professor Greenleaf could not have written the Constitution because his recent writing showed that he opposed "economic rights of women," a provision in the document. Furthermore, Brown argued, it is highly unlikely that Greenleaf would have included the articles that "restricted the ownership of property and citizenship rights in Liberia to blacks."<sup>20</sup> Studies in Atlantic history can shed more light on this topic.

By the 1760s, the idea of "natural rights," which American revolutionaries soon adopted—and was later enshrined in Liberia's 1847 Declaration of Independence—circulated throughout the Atlantic world. One group responsible for the transmission was sailors, the "motley crew," whose radical views of "fundamental rights of man" inspired Samuel Adams, one of the founders of the American Revolution.<sup>21</sup> Atlantic seaports cities—Boston (Massachusetts), Baltimore (Maryland), and Charles Town (later Charleston, South Carolina), for example—became the nodes for the dissemination of revolutionary ideas. Therefore, emigrants from these regions en route to Liberia, especially free blacks who resided in urban centers, would have been familiar with this political rhetoric. In this light, it is important to note that by 1900, three of Liberia's presidents were free blacks from Maryland: Stephen A. Benson, Daniel B. Warner, and Garretson W. Gibson.

Imperialism: Americo-Liberian Rule over the African Peoples of Liberia, 1847-1964," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 7 (1973), 217-36.

<sup>20</sup>Robert Brown, "Simon Greenleaf and the Liberian Constitution of 1847," *Liberian Studies Journal* 9 (1980-1981), 54.

<sup>21</sup>See Peter Linebaugh, and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston, 2000), 216.

Also, not only did the majority of all Liberian immigrants hailed from Virginia—a birthplace to radical voices of “natural rights,” Thomas Jefferson and Patrick Henry, for example; a few were educated and displayed keen political consciousness. One such Virginian emigrant was Hilary Teage, who was recognized by contemporaries on both sides of the Atlantic as “the Jefferson of Liberia” for his authorship of the Liberian Declaration of Independence.<sup>22</sup> Teage was born around 1801 in Richmond (a city steeped in the revolutionary ideals of natural rights). Both of his parents were educated, an uncommon phenomenon for blacks of the period. In Liberia, Teage’s education and intellect was quickly noticed. Among other things, he became active in the Constitution Convention that debated the merits of declaring independence. Following independence, Teage held several government positions, including senator and secretary of state.<sup>23</sup> Another prominent Virginian was Joseph Jenkins Roberts, the first president of Liberia, born of free parents in Norfolk. All together Virginians filled five presidencies, topping Maryland as the state with the highest American born presidents by the turn of the century: Roberts (two non-consecutive terms), James Spriggs Payne (two non-consecutive terms), and Anthony W. Gardner.

All this points to a high level of political awareness and engagement on the part of the emigrants, which had its origins in the broader Atlantic world.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, it is inconceivable that men displaying such high level of political participation would have (among others) written the preamble to the Constitution—in which they denounced racism meted out to them in the United States—but left the writing of the actual constitution to an unknown white American.<sup>25</sup> Brown’s argument against the supposed Greenleaf

<sup>22</sup>AR (1865), 181.

<sup>23</sup>For more on Teage, see Carl P. Borrowes, *Power and Press Freedom in Liberia: The Impact of Globalization and Civil Society on Media-Government Relations* (Trenton, 2004), Chapters 2-3. On black Virginians, see Marie Tyler-McGraw, *An African Republic: Black and White Virginians in the Making of Liberia* (Chapel Hill NC, 2007).

<sup>24</sup>Robert Brown followed the roles that Teage and the others played in the debate leading to the Declaration. Brown, “Simon Greenleaf and the Liberian Constitution of 1847.”

<sup>25</sup>The relevant part of the Declaration appears on page 14.



authorship is strong; Atlantic history makes the case even stronger by situating the debate in the reality of the broader Atlantic world.

This paper demonstrates how the Atlantic model of convergence can provide alternative interpretation in Liberian history.

## II

The Atlantic world came into being in the wake of Christopher Columbus's historic 1492 passage to what became known as the New World or the Americas. Following Columbus's voyage, Europeans, Africans, and Native Americans converged in the Atlantic basin and created numerous multicultural societies on a scale previously unknown. Atlantic communities were bonded foremost by the commerce in enslaved Africans; in the Americas, the majority produced staple crops largely for overseas markets. African enslavement in the New World ended in 1888 when Brazil outlawed the last vestige of slavery. The abolition of slavery in the basin marked the end of the historic Atlantic world. A new era followed, as industrialization overtook cash crop production as the dominant economic order.

Migration was the defining characteristic of the Atlantic world, and Africa played a leading role. The trajectory was Old to New World, that is, from Europe and Africa to the Americas. From 1492 to the end of the eighteenth century, an estimated twelve million persons embarked for the New World; enslaved Africans constituted ten million, while Europeans accounted for the remainder.<sup>26</sup> Immigration remained strong after 1820, except now it was Europe, not Africa, contributing the lion's share. It is estimated that six million Europeans landed in the relatively short period between 1820 and 1870. This figure brings the over-all immigrant population in the Americas

<sup>26</sup>Alfred Crosby, "Infectious Disease and the Demography of the Atlantic Peoples," in: Thomas Benjamin, Timothy Hall, and David Rutherford (ed.), *The Atlantic World in the Age of Empire* (Boston, 2001), 174; David Eltis, "The Volume and Structure of the Transatlantic Slave Trade: A Reassessment," *William and Mary Quarterly* 58 (2001), 17-53; Aaron S. Fogleman, "From Slaves, Convicts, and Servants to Free Passengers: The Transformation of Immigration in the Era of the American Revolution," *The Journal of American History* 85 (1998), 43-76.

to at least sixteen million by the close of the 1800s, with the vast majority still African. Altogether, it is said that roughly 12.5 million Africans were transported to the Americas from 1519 to 1867, though only 10.7 million actually landed; 1.8 million lives were lost on the oceanic voyage or Middle Passage as a result of the appalling tragic and insalubrious conditions on the vessels.<sup>27</sup>

Notwithstanding the overwhelming numerical advantage, Africa's role in the making of the Atlantic world is often forgotten. An example of this neglect is found in Alfred Crosby's ground-breaking *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492*; it is a study of the historic traffic across the Atlantic. The book documents the exchange of plants, animals, and germs in the Atlantic basin, but omits the role of Africa. Crosby was apparently unaware that the transatlantic slave trade was responsible for introducing some major food staples to the Americas, as well as diseases like malaria and yellow fevers.<sup>28</sup> For instance, it is well documented that rice (African *Oryza glaberrima* or the Asian *Oryza Sativa*), okra, sesame, yam, and black-eyed peas were transported from Africa to the New World.<sup>29</sup> Crosby failed, perhaps more conspicuously, to bring up the pre-Columbian, Iberian-West African exchange in the eastern Atlantic. Though smaller in scope and duration, the Iberia-West Africa convergence was precursor to the so-called Columbian Exchange.

The date of the West Africa-Iberia traffic was around 1441, the year of the first seaborne contact between Europe and Africa and more than a half century before the Columbian Exchange. The

<sup>27</sup>See essays and estimates in *Voyages – The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database* <http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/assessment/essays-intro-01.faces>; Aaron S. Fogleman, "The Atlantic World, 1492-1860s: Definition, Theory, and Boundaries." International Seminar on the History of the Atlantic World, 21-23 June 2007, Harvard University, Cambridge MA.

<sup>28</sup>Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange*, xiii; Judith Carney, *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas* (Cambridge MA, 2001), 4-5; William H. McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples* (New York, 1977), 221-23.

<sup>29</sup>Carney, *Black Rice*, Chapters 1-5; Michael Gomez, *Reversing Sail: A History of the African Diaspora* (New York, 2005), 213; Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York, 1976), 542; Buisseret, and Reinhardt, *Creolization*, 46.

encounter set into motion a direct exchange between West Africa and southern Europe, particularly the Iberian nations of Portugal and Spain. A major component of the traffic involved the transportation of African captives to Iberia. At least one hundred Africans arrived in Portugal annually from 1441 to 1492, and that number rose steadily thereafter.<sup>30</sup> Besides captives, the pre-Columbian Atlantic traffic included two grains, malagueta pepper (*Aframomun melegueta*) and rice. Malagueta grew wild in the region between Sierra Leone and Liberia, and rice was cultivated extensively from Senegal to western Ivory Coast. This is the source of the designations Grain Coast, Malagueta Coast, and Rice Coast which were applied interchangeably to the Liberian coast prior to the nineteenth century.<sup>31</sup> Malagueta was exported to southern Europe. Here, the “grains of paradise” as the pepper was dubbed, was not only a condiment but it became an ingredient in the concoction of beer.<sup>32</sup> The lure of malagueta has continued down to the present. For instance, a current advertisement for the American “Sam Adams” beer claims that the brew contains the enigmatic “grains of paradise.”

West Africa’s contribution to the pre-Columbian Atlantic involved more than grains and captives. Consider the case of sugar cane, the original and most important cash crop that was cultivated in the Atlantic world. For most of Atlantic history, cane sugar was the number one sweetener, and the New World was the primary producer. However, the New World sugar cane industry has its provenance in the eastern Atlantic islands off the coast of West Africa. Sugar-making technology had first spread westward from India and reached the eastern shores of the Mediterranean Ocean around the ninth century.<sup>33</sup> By the 1200s, the Mediterranean sugar industry became the regular supplier of European sugar. The sugar industry continued its

<sup>30</sup>A.C. de C.M. Saunders, *A Social History of Black Slaves and Freedmen in Portugal 1441-1555* (Cambridge, 1982), 19; Douglas R. Egerton et al., *The Atlantic World: A History, 1400-1888* (Champaign IL, 2007), 59.

<sup>31</sup>Carney, *Black Rice*, 13-14; Harry Johnston, *Liberia I* (London, 1906), 43, 58-59.

<sup>32</sup>Kiple and Ornelas, *World History of Food 2* (New York, 2000), 1209; Johnston, *Liberia I*, 43, 58-59.

<sup>33</sup>J.H. Galloway, *The Sugar Cane Industry: An Historical Geography from its Origins to 1914* (New York, 1989), 19-31.

westward migration, arriving in the eastern Atlantic islands of Madeira and the Canaries around the fifteenth century; there, Spanish planters cultivated the cane and manufactured sugar for export. By the next century, Portuguese planters were manufacturing sugar further south in São Tomé, the pin-sized island located at Africa's armpit.<sup>34</sup> São Tomé became the leading sugar exporter from around the 1550s-1590s. Production in the eastern Atlantic, including São Tomé, declined shortly afterward, as Spanish and Portuguese planters transferred their operations to the equally favorable, lush tropical lands of the New World they now lay claims to.<sup>35</sup>

There is much continuity between the eastern Atlantic islands and the later New World plantation system. For instance, it is likely that the first Old World cash crop in the Americas was the sugarcane saplings Columbus carried from Madeira to Hispaniola (now Haiti and the Dominican Republic) on his second voyage in 1493.<sup>36</sup> The cane initially foundered, but recovered; about half century later, Hispaniola had become a sugar manufacturer.<sup>37</sup> More significantly, it was the eastern Atlantic model of sugar production that was transplanted in the New World. That model, specifically São Tomé's, contained a novel component. Until the advent of the São Tomé plantations, labor for the sugar industry consisted of a mixed race of servile and quasi-free laborers.<sup>38</sup> São Tomé's was markedly different, because Portuguese planters came to rely entirely on enslaved Africans. According to Galloway, it was the São Tomé model that was transferred to the New World—sugarcane mills and African chattel in tow—"having in fact more in common with the first American colonies that were developing about the same time."<sup>39</sup>

<sup>34</sup>Galloway, *Sugar Cane Industry*, 19-60. Also Curtin, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex*, 3-24.

<sup>35</sup>Curtin, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex*, Chapter 4.

<sup>36</sup>Galloway, *Sugar Cane Industry*, 61.

<sup>37</sup>Crosby, *Columbian Exchange*, 69.

<sup>38</sup>E.g., Galloway, *Sugar Cane Industry*, 53, 57; Sidney M. Greenfield, "Madeira and the Beginning of New World Sugar Cane Cultivation and Plantation Slavery: A Study in Institution Building," *Annals New York Academy of Sciences* 293 (1977), 536-53.

<sup>39</sup>Galloway, *Sugar Cane Industry*, 58, 60.

More Atlantic societies were planted on the African coast after the demise of the eastern Atlantic sugar colonies. Among them were several founded by African descended populations from the New World Diaspora. Organized transportation to Africa began in England in 1787 when free blacks, London's "Black Poor," were sent out to what would become Sierra Leone. The settler community, which ultimately included blacks from the United States and the Caribbean, became known as Krio (from Creole). Next was Liberia, founded just south of Sierra Leone. It was established in 1822 by free blacks from the United States. Emigration continued throughout the century. A final example of black Atlantic community is the Afro-Brazilians. Prior to the 1800s, members of the free Afro-Brazilian population had returned sporadically to West Africa. However, organized immigration began in 1835 when some enslaved and free Africans were banished to Africa for their alleged involvement in a slave revolt in the Brazilian northeastern city of Bahia. Regular emigration resumed following Brazil's abolition of the slave trade in 1850. Most Afro-Brazilians resettled in Lagos and Porto-Novo (present-day Nigeria and the Republic of Benin respectively).<sup>40</sup>

These societies on the African side of the Atlantic exposed a major paradox in Atlantic history. Though their members had been previously freed from chattel slavery in the American and European Atlantic, they were still denied equality and encountered virulent racism and long-standing prejudice; faced with widespread legalized discrimination, emigration became their only alternative. All this occurred in the era when the notion of "equality and liberty" had become the standard rhetoric in the Atlantic basin—in the United States, Britain, and France, for example. Liberia's immigrants, the Americo-Liberians, articulated the paradox of emancipation without freedom in their 1847 Declaration of Independence:

<sup>40</sup>E.g., Robin Law, "The Evolution of the Afro-Brazilian Community in Ouidah," in: Kristin Mann, and Edna Bay (ed.), *Rethinking the African Diaspora: The Making of a Black Atlantic World in the Bight of Benin and Brazil* (London, 2001), 22-41; Elisée Soumonni, "Afro-Brazilian Communities of the Bight of Benin," in: Paul E. Lovejoy, and David V. Trotman (ed.), *Trans-Atlantic Dimension of Ethnicity in the African Diaspora* (London, 2003), 181-94.

We [...] were originally the inhabitants of the United States of North America. In some parts of that country, *we were debarred by law from all the rights and privileges of men; in other parts, public sentiments, more powerful than law, frowned us down. [...] We were compelled to contribute to the resources of a country, which gave us no protection . [...]* All hope of a favorable change in our country was thus wholly extinguished in our bosom, *and we looked with anxiety abroad for some asylum from the deep degradation [italics mine].*<sup>41</sup>

In spite of the apparent alienation, the Krio, Americo-Liberian, and Afro-Brazilian communities showed a strong attachment to the cultures and values of their erstwhile homes across the Atlantic, evidence of the bond that held the larger Atlantic world together. For instance, Americo-Liberians had no aversion to wearing their American frock coats and top hats in the simmering African heat; nor did they hesitate to practice their Protestant Christianity and Masonic order; and as indicated above, they preferred American imports like pork, bacon, and flour. Similarly, Afro-Brazilians showed marked preference for Iberian Catholicism, Brazilian food, and dress. Those living in colonial Nigeria and Dahomey (now Republic of Benin) insisted that their children be instructed in the Portuguese language, not English and French.<sup>42</sup> The Krios of Sierra Leone were not to be outdone. Most affected English mannerism. In the nineteenth century, for instance, Krios adopted appropriate Anglophone splendor to celebrate the birthday of the British monarch, Queen Victoria (called “We Mammy,” or “Our Mother”), in the hybrid Krio language.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>41</sup>Nathaniel Richardson, *Liberia's Past and Present* (London, 1959), 64.

<sup>42</sup>Dov Ronen, *Dahomey: Between Tradition and Modernity* (Ithaca/London, 1975), 24-38; Soumonni, “Afro-Brazilian Communities”; Marianno Carneiro da Cunha, *From Slave Quarters to Town Houses: Brazilian Architecture in Nigeria and the Peoples' Republic of Benin* (Sao Paulo, 1985), 4-94.

<sup>43</sup>Leo Spitzer, “The Sierra Leone Creoles 1870-1900,” in: Philip D. Curtin (ed.), *Africa and the West: Intellectual Response to European Culture* (Madison WI, 1972), 99-138, in particular 100, 102.

### III

The Liberian society that was established in the nineteenth century was typical of the continuity and change taking place in the Atlantic world. Like the broader Atlantic region, Liberia's population of Americo-Liberians, Barbadians, and Africans was a mixture of different cultures thrown together by disparate historical circumstances. Of the three groupings, the Africans were clearly the majority and the first to have arrived intermittently on the Atlantic coast centuries prior to 1800. However, a small percentage of the Africans were nineteenth-century arrivals from different parts of the continent; they were liberated from time to time on slave ships and resettled in Liberia. Barbadians were the last immigrant group, all having arrived in the second half of the century. Thus, Liberia's disparate population was representative of the cultural diversity characteristic of the Atlantic world. But Liberia also represented the new era that was unfolding in the basin—the transition from slave to free society.

Liberia was established on the jagged promontory that centuries earlier a Portuguese mariner named Cape Mesurado or Montserado.<sup>44</sup> In 1824 the colony was officially christened Liberia, meaning “a settlement of persons made free.”<sup>45</sup> When the American Colonization Society (ACS), the private sponsor of the Liberian colony, shuttered its offices in Washington DC in 1912, it had transported an estimated 17,000 blacks to Liberia. Additionally, 2,000 or so persons were transported by various state colonization societies; Maryland Colonization Society was the most successful. The MCS resettled roughly 1,227 blacks in its independent colony of “Maryland in Africa” before the settlement was annexed by the Republic of Liberia in 1857.<sup>46</sup> This brings the total emigrant population to approximately 18,227, a figure that represented a smattering of the free black popu-

<sup>44</sup>Johnston claims that Mesurado means calm, the “lessened surf,” as opposed to the rough waves of the nearby Atlantic Ocean (Johnston, *Liberia* I, 40).

<sup>45</sup>Seventh Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Color (hereafter Annual Report) (1824), 6.

<sup>46</sup>Penelope Campbell, *Maryland in Africa: The Maryland State Colonization Society 1831-1857* (Urbana IL, 1971).

lation in the United States.<sup>47</sup> Opposition to colonization was generally high, as free blacks accused the ACS of collaborating with American racists to expel them from the land of their birth.<sup>48</sup>

About 80% of all the emigrants departed from the South where slavery remained entrenched until 1865; Pennsylvania and New York were the largest non-southern contributors. As the largest exported, Virginia accounted for approximately 22%. About a third of all emigrants were emancipated practically to go to Liberia; William Burke falls in this category. “In looking over my mother’s papers,” Burke’s owner Mary Lee recorded around 1853, “the greatest desire of her soul was [...] our slaves should be enabled to emancipate to Africa. [...] William [Burke] and his family [...] will act as pioneers [...]”<sup>49</sup>

The 346 men, women, and children from Barbados that came ashore in Liberia in 1865 comprised the sole group of New World emigrants from outside the United States.<sup>50</sup> They fled the racism and segregation that followed emancipation in the British Empire nearly three decades earlier.<sup>51</sup> The Barbadians and their black American cousins shared Western culture, specifically the English language and Protestant Christianity. Barbadians made important contributions to Liberian agriculture though not in the one area commonly supposed. There is a persistent but unfounded assumption that Barbadians “introduced” sugar cane to Liberia.<sup>52</sup> True, black Barbadians had

<sup>47</sup>The free black population in the United States grew steadily for almost every decade between 1790 and 1860, that is, it went from 59,527 to about 500,000. Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery, 1619-1877* (New York, 2003), Table 2, 253.

<sup>48</sup>E.g., P.J. Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement: 1816-1865* (New York, 1980), Chapters 1-3; Lamont Thomas, *Paul Cuffe: Black Entrepreneur and Pan-Africanist* (Urbana IL, 1988), 107-12; Kenneth Barnes, *Journey of Hope: The Back-to-Africa Movement in Arkansas in the Late 1800s* (Chapel Hill NC, 2004), Introduction; Charles Henry Huberich, *The Political and Legislative History of Liberia I*, (New York, 1947), 18-66.

<sup>49</sup>Cited in Marie Tyler-McGraw, *An African Republic: Black and White Virginians in the Making of Liberia* (Chapel Hill NC, 2007), 120.

<sup>50</sup>AR (1865), 236-42.

<sup>51</sup>E.g., Hilary Beckles, *Great House Rules: Landless Emancipation and Workers’ Protest in Barbados, 1838-1938* (Kingston, Jamaica, 2004).

<sup>52</sup>E.g., Clarence L. Simpson, *The Memoirs of C.L. Simpson: The Symbol of Liberia* (London, 1961), 100.



a long history with sugar production, having begun producing the crop for English slaveholders back in the seventeenth century.<sup>53</sup> Also, a number of the Barbadians who immigrated to Liberia are described as “Sugar Boiler,” “Sugar Clarifier,” “Distiller,” and “Millwright” among others.<sup>54</sup>

Still, the Liberian sugar industry preceded the Barbadians. To begin, sugarcane was already a local crop when the first settlers arrived in 1822;<sup>55</sup> the source of the Liberian cane was most likely the Atlantic islands discussed above. Also, sugar manufacturing (and export) was well underway in Liberia when the Barbadians disembarked. Finally, the sugar industry was owned almost certainly by black Americans, all of whom traveled to Liberia prior to 1865.<sup>56</sup> Rather, it was to the ginger trade, not sugar, that the Barbadian made significant contribution. Shortly after their arrival, enterprising Barbadians reinvigorated the crop and commenced regular export.<sup>57</sup>

Indigenous Africans were much more heterogeneous. They consisted of various linguistic groupings from the West African savanna that “drifted” to the coast.<sup>58</sup> Exactly when the migrations began is uncertain. Evidence does indicate that by the eighteenth century most of the migrants occupied the territories they presently inhabit.<sup>59</sup> Their languages are classified into Mande, Kruan or Kwa, and West Atlantic or Mel, all of which belong to the much larger Niger-Congo

<sup>53</sup>Richard Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1972).

<sup>54</sup>AR, 1865, 236-42.

<sup>55</sup>Jehudi Ashmun, *The Liberian Farmer; Or Colonists Guide to Independence and Domestic Comfort* (Philadelphia, 1835), 14, 23; Staudenraus, *African Colonization*, 49.

<sup>56</sup>William E. Allen, “Sugar and Coffee: A History of Settler Agriculture in Nineteenth-Century Liberia,” PhD, Florida International University (2002), 95-114.

<sup>57</sup>AR (1848), 282; AR (1852), 242; AR (1868), 307; AR (1873), 215.

<sup>58</sup>Walter Rodney, *History of the Upper Guinea Coast, 1545-1800* (Oxford, 1970), 6, 15; Svend Holsoe, “Slavery and Economic Response among the Vai (Liberia and Sierra Leone),” in: Suzanne Miers, and Igor Kopytoff (ed.), *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives* (Madison WI, 1977), 287-303; Martin Ford, “Kola Production and Settlement Mobility Among the Dan of Nimba, Liberia,” *African Economic History* 20 (1992), 51-63.

<sup>59</sup>Paul E.H. Hair, “An Account of the Liberian Hinterland c. 1780,” *Sierra Leone Studies* 16 (1962), 218-26.

language stock. Mande has the highest number of speakers in Liberia. Among them is the Kpelle from central Liberia, the largest of Liberia's present sixteen ethnic groups. Another Mande group is the Vai, reportedly the first to arrive on the Atlantic coast and the inventor of the Vai script, the oldest native writing in black Africa.<sup>60</sup> The Bassa, Dei and Kru represent Kruan-speakers, all of whom played leading roles on the Atlantic coast before and after the formation of Liberia. Bassa-speakers were among the first on the coast to trade with the early Europeans; they exchanged malaguetta pepper and enslaved Africans, among others, for Western manufactures. The Dei are historically remembered for ceding Cape Montserrado to the American colonists, although they later tried to reclaim that land. Kru are especially noted for their maritime skills. Because of the lack of natural harbor on the Liberian coast, ships were forced to anchor miles away from the shore. Kru seaman would deftly ferry people (including captive Africans) and goods over dangerous surfs in dugout canoes to and fro. The West Atlantic group constitutes the smallest number of speakers: Kissi and Gola.

In spite of the broad language differences, these ethnic groups shared many common traditions, one of which was subsistence farming. For example, in the early years, the white agent of the Colony of Liberia, Jehudi Ashmun (1822-1828), described the regular African farming system:

American crops and the American modes of tillage must nearly all be given up. [...] The natives who have no almanacs [...] are never behind in their rice-plantations. In the months of March and April, their plantations fires sent up columns of smoke in all directions; and the month of June witnesses a most verdant display of springing rice in the neighborhood of all the towns.<sup>61</sup>

Therefore, agriculture became one of the areas that the settlers came to rely on indigenous knowledge from the very beginning of the encounter.

<sup>60</sup>Konrad Tuchscherer, and Paul E.H. Hair, "Cherokee and West Africa: Examining the Origins of the Vai Scripts," *History in Africa* 29 (2009), 428.

<sup>61</sup>Jehudi Ashmun, *The Liberian Farmer or Colonist Guide to Independence and Domestic Comfort* (Philadelphia, 1835), 1, 8.

The small percentage of Africans who were liberated from slave vessels comprised the recaptives or recaptured Africans. They were rescued on the Atlantic Ocean by the United States Navy, attempting to enforce that nation's 1808 ban on the slave trade. Efforts by the Navy resulted in the resettlement of an approximate total of 5,722 recaptives in Liberia.<sup>62</sup> Most recaptured Africans claimed to be from "Congo," an allusion to the multiethnic Kingdom of Kongo in West Central Africa that extended from inland to the Atlantic coast by the fifteenth century. Other minor groups included the Igbo from present Nigeria. Naturally, in Liberia all recaptives became "Congoes."<sup>63</sup>

In a way, Liberia was established foremost as a refuge for the Congoes. This was so because funds used by the ACS to transport the first black colonists to Africa and to purchase the Cape were allocated by the United States "for the safeguarding, support, and removal" of recaptives marooned in the United States.<sup>64</sup> President James Monroe—a supporter of African colonization—turned over a portion of the federal funds to the insolvent ACS, which the organization then used to implement its own colonization scheme.<sup>65</sup> In 1824, the ACS rewarded Monroe when it named Liberia's first town—now the capital—in his honor; the name "Monrovia" the ACS recalled, was "an acknowledgement of the important benefits conferred on the settlement" by the president.<sup>66</sup> Even though no recaptives were recruited for the ACS maiden 1820 voyage to Africa, they were among the latter settlers that took possession of Cape Mersurado in 1822.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>62</sup>E.g., ACS, Annual Report (hereafter Annual Report) (1867), 64.

<sup>63</sup>AR and CJ (1839), 9; AR (1861), 94; Wiley, *Slaves No More*, 210; Eltis "Volume and Structure," Map II.

<sup>64</sup>Quoted in Staudenraus, *African Colonization Movement*, 50. Concerns that recaptives would be re-enslaved upon returning, resulted in only a few going home. Huberich, *Political and Legislative History*, 631. But some Congoes did return following assimilation; AR (1890), 38.

<sup>65</sup>Staudenraus, *African Colonization Movement*; Chapter V; Huberich, *Political and Legislative History*, Chapter XVI.

<sup>66</sup>Annual Report (1824), 6.

<sup>67</sup>Annual Report (1824), 52-106; Huberich, *Political and Legislative History*, Chapter XVI; Abayomi Karnga, *The Negro Republic on West Africa* (Monrovia, 1909), 10-11.

## IV

Becoming Liberian—adjustment to circumstances in the new environment—was much more difficult and uncertain for some than for others. In the end, it required the kind of acculturation that has been documented throughout the Atlantic world. The recaptives faced some of the greatest challenges. In 1861, John Seys, the American agent in charge of recaptured Africans in Liberia, described the condition of the “emaciated savages” rescued from several vessels: “That many died, especially on the *Nightingale*, was to have been expected . . . no human skill or agency could have saved these mere living skeletons, or revived these dry bones.”<sup>68</sup> An earlier account by American resident physician in Liberia, Doctor Lugenbeel, told an equally dismal story of Africans liberated from the American ship, *The Pons* in 1846: “There was upwards of nine hundred slaves on board [...] information I derived from the Italian captain [...] I succeeded in landing seven hundred and fifty-six [...] upwards of one hundred and fifty having died during the passage [...] The large majority were boys from ten to twenty years of age.”<sup>69</sup>

Freedom was certainly a tremendous relief. For most recaptives, their ordeal had begun many months earlier in the African hinterland. Captured in remote villages and fettered together, the coffle was marched to the coast. The harrowing experience during the long, painful trek was undeniable: shock of captivity, sale and re-sale, and the scarcity of food and water resulted in untold suffering. Mortality is estimated as high as that of the Middle Passage—10% to 15%—sometimes much steeper.<sup>70</sup> The misery and death continued on the slave ship, which accounts for the “living skeletons” and roughly 17% mortality suggested by Doctor Lugenbeel.

Though relieved from the hellish condition of enslavement, resettlement in a strange land created angst for the recaptives. Concerns over re-enslavement prevented the Congoes from returning to their respective homes. On the other hand, being forever separated from

<sup>68</sup>AR and CJ (1846), 112.

<sup>69</sup>AR and CJ (1846), 112.

<sup>70</sup>Gomez, *Reversing Sail*, 73.

families and friends led to tremendous agony, most painful for the large percentage of teenagers. The story of one Congo youth from *The Pons*, renamed Daniel Bacon by his Liberian family, is illustrative. Daniel had adjusted well to his new life—learned English and became a Christian. But he still yearned for his “large family . . . that dear father and mother and little brothers and sisters.” Daniel’s hope that he would one day find some of his family led him to seek employment at the center for new recaptives. Around 1859, more than a decade after his liberation, Daniel joyfully discovered his “own little brother” who had been rescued from the slave ship, *Niagara* and brought to Liberia.<sup>71</sup> The proportion of Congo that were children is unclear. However, all together, children represented more than a quarter (about 28%) of transatlantic slaves. Daniel’s joy of ultimate reunion with a family was a rarity for this delicate group.

After convalescing, Congoes were required to learn the “elements of civilization,” or to shed their “savage” state. Some were relocated permanently in separate towns. New Georgia, for instance, was founded in the 1830s for recaptured Africans who were previously stranded in the American state of Georgia.<sup>72</sup> Congo youths, like Daniel, were apprenticed to families. Agent, Seys spoke of the development “of my own boys,” and explained how in 1863 former president Joseph J. Roberts’s “Congo youth” was called Benjamin Coates, “who after a bow [...] repeated from memory [...] the apostles’ creed, and a little hymn [...]”<sup>73</sup> Abayomi Karna (whose publications are cited here) was a Congo-descended person. He wrote that “little or no attention was paid to their education or material development,” and spoke of “all the difficulties in a new country and repression by their guardians [Americo-Liberians].”<sup>74</sup>

Nonetheless, the lot of many Congoes changed following the apprenticeship—and so did their collective identity. By the late

<sup>71</sup>AR (1865), 150-51.

<sup>72</sup>Claude Clegg, *The Price of Liberty: African Americans and the Making of Liberia* (Chapel Hill NC, 2004), 92-93.

<sup>73</sup>AR, (1863), 111, 30. On the apprenticeship system, see, AR and CJ (1826), 218; Abayomi Karna, *History of Liberia* (Liverpool, 1926), 12.

<sup>74</sup>Karna, *History of Liberia*, 12.

1800s educated Congoes were gradually absorbed into the Americo-Liberian power structure. Among the most prominent were Representative Daniel Ricks and Senators J.W. Worrell and Zack Brown.<sup>75</sup> Karnga is perhaps the most prominent twentieth-century Congo descended person. He was a teacher and held several positions in government, one of which was associate justice of the Supreme Court.

Hardly any studies have been conducted to examine the give-and-take that occurred as the result of the convergence of the various groups. As suggested previously, this is due partly to the flawed assumption that the process of integration was uni-dimensional, that is, an “assimilation” of Western culture by the Congoes (and the local Africans). But the dearth is also due to Liberianists’ unfamiliarity with the emergent Atlantic history. This 1862 account by leading sugar farmer, William Anderson, suggests ways in which acculturation occurred:

Allow me here to digress a little and speak a word for the recent laborers [...] the *Congoes*. My *entire farming operations* are carried on with them [...] My sugar maker, cooper, and fireman are Congoes, and their entire acquaintance with the material parts have been gained by observation. At *wood chopping they cannot be excelled* [italics mine].<sup>76</sup>

This was a crucial contribution, given that the American emigrants were utterly unfamiliar with Africa’s alien farming system. Note that Congoes possessed the identical skills—knowledge of farming—that motivated plantations in the New World to target Africans for enslavement in the first place. For example, the demand for rice cultivators in the United States South led plantation owners to specifically request captives from the “Rice Coast;” these rice cultivators then introduced rice cultivation and milling technology to the United States.

For Barbadians, the transition to a Liberian identity was relatively quicker. Because of their familiarity with Western culture, the Barbadians were not subjected to the same prejudice that the Congoes

<sup>75</sup>Karnga, *History of Liberia*, 12-13; AR (1858), 294.

<sup>76</sup>AR (1863), 28.

encountered. For instance, from the offset Barbadians were perceived as generally resourceful. According to one contemporary source, Barbadians were “the most intelligent and best-educated company of emigrants that ever came to Liberia and equally industrious [...] many were first-class mechanics [...] teachers [...]”<sup>77</sup> In contrast, Americo-Liberians generally considered the Congoes not only as “savages” but “dull and stupid.”<sup>78</sup> The small Barbadian settlement of Crozerville, some twenty miles on the outskirts of Cape Mesurado, knitted the group. Each family was allocated twenty-five acres, likely equal to what an Americo-Liberian household received. Many Barbadians and their descendants received early training in Crozerville. With education and Western background, Barbadians tended to meld easily with the Americo-Liberian population. Arthur Barclay, who emigrated with his parents at the age of ten, was among the first generation of Barbadian achievers; he was elected president of Liberia barely two decades after stepping ashore. His nephew, Edwin Barclay, who also ascended to the presidency in 1930, was Liberian born.

Thus, the Barbadians, Americo-Liberians and Congoes constituted Liberia’s ruling class by the end of the nineteenth century. Excluded from the power structure was the disproportionately larger population of indigenous Africans, who were denied voting and civil rights. In the first half of the twentieth century, a few were appointed to positions of power. Among them was Momolu Massaquoi, a Vai, who served in a number of capacities including secretary of the interior. Another was H. Too Wesley, a Grebo (Kruan group); in 1920, Wesley became the first indigenous African to ascend the high office of vice president. Both were co-opted through the Americo-Liberian system of apprenticeship. But even when suffrage was extended to the indigenous people nearly a century after the Republic was established, it came with an important caveat: only designated paramount chiefs could cast a single vote for their respective “tribes.”<sup>79</sup> Of

<sup>77</sup>AR (1873), 274.

<sup>78</sup>AR (1871), 284.

<sup>79</sup>J. Gus Liebenow, *Liberia: The Quest for Democracy* (Bloomington IN, 1987), 47-49; Yekutiel Gershoni, “The First Republic of Liberia: The Evolution of a Single Society State,” *Liberian Studies Journal* 28 (2003), 65-73.

course, all that changed with the 1980 coup d'état, because it upended Americo-Liberian rule and ushered into power "native" or "country people."

One observation about the Liberian ruling class seems relevant. The Americo-Liberians, Barbadians, and recaptives were products of the Atlantic world and the transatlantic slave trade. They were drawn together by another common denominator. Each was a settler, the one social group that held sway throughout the New World. In his study of historic migrations in Africa, Curtin theorized that confidence in the superiority of one's resources was "the oldest and most consistent" motivation for relocation.<sup>80</sup> For example, *Homo erectus* evidently learned to manage fire before emigrating from Africa, becoming probably the first hominid to work with natural flame. The Bantu acquired skills as cultivators and herders prior to their intermittent migration throughout sub-Saharan Africa some three millennia ago. On the other hand, farming, and livestock were unknown to the autochthons that the migrating Bantu encountered. Similarly it was Columbus's confidence in the supremacy of Europe's maritime technology and his zealous faith in the primacy of a Christian God that emboldened him to venture the Atlantic crossing. Likewise Liberia's American and Barbadian emigrants believed in the incomparability of Western civilization, and so did the newly "civilized" Congoes and "natives." In the 1920s, the Congo-descended Karmga wrote that the transatlantic slave trade "was a school of experience," because through it Africa was "re-enlightened" by Western civilization.<sup>81</sup>

## V

Much has been written about the "assimilation" of western culture by the "natives" who were "civilized" by Americo-Liberians.<sup>82</sup> To

<sup>80</sup>Philip D. Curtin, *Why People Move: Migration in African History* (Waco TX, 1994), 43.

<sup>81</sup>Karmga, *History of Liberia*, 19.

<sup>82</sup>See for example, Liebenow, *Quest for Democracy*, 47-49; Gershoni, "The First Republic of Liberia," 70-71. A notable exception to this thinking is John Yoder, *Popular Culture, Civil Society, and State Crisis in Liberia* (New York, 2003).



begin, the Americo-Liberian society was hardly the “enclave” it is purported, because Africans were never shut out. “Along the Liberian coast” wrote Elias Jones in 1880, “the towns of the colonists and the natives are intermingled, and are often quite near to each other.”<sup>83</sup> Also, Americo-Liberian settlements were located at or near the mouths of rivers and trade routes, ensuring continuous access to the valuable “country trade.” More importantly, the apprenticeship system that was instituted by Americo-Liberians in 1838 required “native” boys and girls to become wards in Americo-Liberian homes; here they adopted western culture. At maturity, the “civilized” Liberians could qualify for citizenship.<sup>84</sup> These interactions paved the way for the mutual exchange of culture.

African influence was present from the very inception of the Liberian colony, and it was enhanced by several factors such as demographic and geographical. Liberian immigrant number remained small relative to the Africans surrounding the settlement. “Our population is still exceedingly scanty,” President Daniel B. Warner reported to the Legislature in 1866.<sup>85</sup> By the early 1900s, the population of “civilized” Africans, i.e., those “assimilated,” nearly quadrupled the 11,850 estimated for Americo-Liberians.<sup>86</sup> The disparity was much higher when compared to the “uncivilized natives” in outlying villages; many commuted to Americo-Liberian towns to trade and work. Indeed, the low settler population was caused by widespread opposition to emigration. However, death took a heavy toll on those that ventured the voyage to Liberia, as they faced an onslaught of diseases, malaria being the deadliest. For instance, out of the total 4,454 that traveled to Liberia by 1843, roughly 2,198 or 49% died of various causes; 845 or 38% succumbed to the “African fever”<sup>87</sup>—a generic nineteenth-century medical term for a host of

<sup>83</sup>AR (1880), 110.

<sup>84</sup>Liebenow, *Liberia*, 110-11; Gershoni, “The First Republic,” 70.

<sup>85</sup>AR (1866), 115.

<sup>86</sup>Johnston, *Liberia I*, 371-72.

<sup>87</sup>Extrapolated from *U. S. Congress, Senate, U. S. Navy Dept., Tables Showing the Number of Emigrants and Recaptured Africans Sent to the Colony of Liberia by the Govt. of the United States. A Census of the Colony* (September, 1843 Senate Document no. 150, 28th Cong., 2nd Session, 1845) (hereafter *Census*).

febrile sicknesses including malaria and yellow fever.<sup>88</sup> In his study of the early Liberian settlement, McDaniel found that “life expectancy at age five was only thirteen years.”<sup>89</sup> Genetic adaptation and measures like the systematic use of quinine probably slowed the disease in the later period, but newcomers remained vulnerable. “Great has been the [...] mortality among the emigrants, who came out with us,” wrote Burke in 1854.<sup>90</sup>

Mortality and its debilitating effects meant, among other things, fewer people were available or willing to farm. “When I first went up the river to clear my farm,” Richard Murray recalled, “some days I could work but a few hours, on account of the fever and chills [...].”<sup>91</sup> Burke deferred farming because “it would not do for me to be out” working.<sup>92</sup> His decision to stay indoors instead and—“go to shoemaking”—was based on existing medical knowledge which assumed that fevers were caused by “malaria” or toxic air that emanated from decaying vegetation.<sup>93</sup> In fact, included in Doctor Lugenbeel’s prophylactic prescription for malaria was his admonishment to newcomers: avoid “exposure to the heat of the day, as well as the damp and chilling night-air.”<sup>94</sup> All this meant that Americo-Liberians would rely much more on the Africans, since lifetime residency in Africa had endowed them with immunity to local pathogens.

Neither was geography on the side of the settlers. Farming in Liberia, as mentioned above, differs sharply with that of the United States in a number of ways. Ashmun noted one difference: “Here,

<sup>88</sup>Philip D. Curtin, “Epidemiology and the Slave Trade,” *Political Science Quarterly* 83 (1968), 208.

<sup>89</sup>Cited in William E. Allen, “Rethinking the History of Settler Agriculture in Nineteenth-Century,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 37 (2004), 455.

<sup>90</sup>Wiley, *Slaves No More*, 191.

<sup>91</sup>AR and CJ (1845), 336.

<sup>92</sup>Wiley, *Slaves No More*, 191.

<sup>93</sup>E.g., Stephen Frenkel, and John Western, “Pretext or Prophylaxis? Racial Segregation and Malarial Mosquitos in a British Tropical Colony: Sierra Leone,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 78 (1988), 213.

<sup>94</sup>J.W. Lugenbeel, *Sketches of Liberia: Comprising A Brief Account of the Geography, Climate, Productions and diseases of the Republic of Liberia* (Washington, 1850), 30-31.

you can find neither Winter, Spring, Summer nor Autumn. These interesting changes have disappeared from the African year.”<sup>95</sup> Absent these seasonal variations, American livestock and food crops withered. “Hogs do not thrive as well [...] they die when about half grown from causes not exactly known,” Burke explained in 1859.<sup>96</sup> Oxen and imported equine repeatedly succumbed to trypanosomiasis, a parasite lethal to people and livestock. In 1851, an immigrant complained that “every thing here has to be done by man; no animal labor to assist [...]”<sup>97</sup> This deficiency contributed to the poor state of agriculture, not the so-called “neglect” that is purported in the historiography.<sup>98</sup> In short, demography and geography rendered the newcomers much more dependent on Africans, which ensure greater interaction, and hence, mutual acculturation.

Indeed, akin to European settlers, Americo-Liberians were concerned about “going native” through close associations with the “backward tribes.” That anxiety explains their attempt to maintain distinctive cultural boundaries such as wearing stuffy Western garb, described by Johnston as “the religion of the tall hat and frock coat.”<sup>99</sup> The anxiety about “taking on African customs” continued in the twentieth century. Barbadian-descended George Padmore recounted the hesitancy of his future wife, “who had the same upbringing,” when he indicated that they would start a new life in the “bush country” away from Monrovia, the capital: “Of course, she gladly accepted my marriage proposal,” wrote Padmore, “but insisted only a few minutes afterwards that she must accompany me in living into the bush country, regardless of the apparent danger, exposure and social sacrifices that must be made.”<sup>100</sup>

<sup>95</sup>Ashmun, *Liberian Farmer*, 3.

<sup>96</sup>Wiley, *Slaves No More*, 208.

<sup>97</sup>AR (1851), 268; William E. Allen, “Historical Methodology and Writing the Liberian Past: The Case of Agriculture in the Nineteenth Century,” *History in Africa* 32 (2005), 32-35.

<sup>98</sup>See Allen, “Historical Methodology.”

<sup>99</sup>Johnston, *Liberia*, 354. See also Elizabeth D. Furbay, *Top Hats and Tom-Toms* (Chicago, 1943).

<sup>100</sup>George A. Padmore, *The Memoirs of a Liberian Ambassador: George Arthur Padmore* (Lewiston NY, 1996), 26.

In spite of their trepidation about close interactions, Americo-Liberians were apt to welcome Africans in their homes as wards, laborers, companions, sexual partners and so forth. In 1827, barely five years after the colony was founded, one visitor observed that “all the American negroes have a number of natives attached to their families, who act as servants and perform all the drudgery.”<sup>101</sup> Similar observation was made near the end of the century by an Americo-Liberian who was visiting the United States: “Our labor is done mostly by the natives.”<sup>102</sup> Like William Anderson, the other successful planters—Jesse Sharp, Solomon Hill, and Augustus Washington, for instance—relied on the labor of Africans, including the Congoes.<sup>103</sup> Hill’s large coffee farm, near his frontier hamlet of Arthington, contained “cluster of native huts,” called “half-town.”<sup>104</sup>

Some of the earliest proof of mutual acculturation occurred in foodways. Ashmun recorded an instance shortly after his advent as agent in 1822. “About twenty arrived from Grand Bassa, having traveled on the beach . . . bringing with them a plentiful supply of rice, and cassada, a few goats, sheep and fowls, and a little palm-oil [...] gave the assurance that the Colony can be easily furnished with all the rice [...]”<sup>105</sup>

All the provisions were “African,” foods the American colonists were practically unaccustomed to. Rice and “cassada” (i.e., cassava) were the principal sources of calories for the indigenous people; cassava was entirely alien, while for most of the newcomers, rice had never been a staple food. Slave ration consisted largely of another grain—corn; blacks received corn meal and prepared a variety of corn-derived recipes like hominy, grits, cornbread, and hoecake.<sup>106</sup>

However, there was one significant group particularly tied to rice culture prior to emigration. This was the South Carolinians, 5% or so

<sup>101</sup>George E. Brooks, “A.A. Adee’s Journal of a Visit to Liberia in 1827,” *Liberian Studies Journal* 1 (1968), 58.

<sup>102</sup>AR (1888), 73.

<sup>103</sup>E.g., AR (1867), 172; AR (1863), 28.

<sup>104</sup>AR (1863), 92.

<sup>105</sup>Annual Report (1823), 44-45.

<sup>106</sup>E.g., Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 545-59; Sam Bowers Hilliard, *Hog Meat and Hoecake: Food Supply in the Old South, 1840-1860* (Carbondale IL, 1972), 48-49.

of all emigrants. From the mid 1700s through the early 1800s, rice was a leading export of South Carolina; it was famously dubbed the “Carolina Gold.” Enslaved Africans, already familiar with rice culture, carried out the back-breaking labor involved in rice cultivation in the unhealthy Carolina swamplands.<sup>107</sup> In fact, South Carolina blacks’ intimate connection with rice accounts for their numerous rice cookeries, all with roots in slavery: e.g., the Carolina Purlow, the Rice Casseroles, and the Carolina’s Rice Breads.<sup>108</sup> Thus, the South Carolinians were certainly among the small number already familiar with rice. An illustration of their enthusiasm for the crop is the contemporary Liberian rice bread, which is almost certainly derived from the various Carolina rice bread menus.

Undoubtedly, cassava was a foreign crop to the Americans. Also known as manioc, tapioca, and yucca, cassava is a plant with roots—literally—in the New World. A tuber, cassava derives its name from “Kasabi,” the language of the Arawak-speaking people of the Caribbean.<sup>109</sup> While this root is just about absent in mainland North America, it is consumed in the Caribbean and South America; for example, Barbadians used cassava flour to bake bread or “cassava pone.”<sup>110</sup> Practically, cassava requires year-long rain and heat which precludes it from the mostly cold climate of the United States.<sup>111</sup> Florida, with its subtropical climate, was likely the only state in the Union to experiment with cassava.<sup>112</sup> Sub-Sahara Africa’s climate of

<sup>107</sup>Carney, *Black Rice*, Chapters 4-6.

<sup>108</sup>Karen Hess, *The South Carolina Rice Kitchen: The African Connection* (Charleston, 1992), Chapters 3, 4, 7.

<sup>109</sup>Kenneth Kiple, and Kriemhild Ornelas (ed.) *The Cambridge World History of Food I* (New York, 2002), 181. In Liberia cassava is so widespread (topped only by rice) that it is normally assumed to be indigenous. A Kpelle tradition claims that cassava was introduced by a wandering hunter. In his desperation to find food, the starving hunter uprooted a feral plant that had four roots; it turned out to be the cassava or “four roots,” as Kpelle called the plant. Gormah Kuteh, interview by William E. Allen, Palala, Liberia, 10 March 1999; record in possession of author.

<sup>110</sup>J.W. Orderson, *Creolena, or, social and domestic scenes and incidents in Barbados in the days of yore; and The Fair Barbadian and faithful black, or, a cure for the gout* (Oxford, 2002), 223.

<sup>111</sup>Cassava was briefly cultivated in subtropical Florida as fodder for pigs: *St. Cloud Tribune*, Florida, 23 December 1909.

<sup>112</sup>Allen, “Rethinking History,” 445.

regular downpour and heat proved suitable for cassava and the other New World crops—e.g., corn and sweet potatoes—that the Portuguese introduced beginning in the 1500s; these were used as food for enslaved Africans bound for the New World.<sup>113</sup>

The American emigrants were somewhat more familiar with the other “African” foods. Chicken was well-known, although it was hardly a mainstay in the foods of enslaved people. Goat meat and mutton were even rarer; in antebellum southern kitchens, pork was the “queen.”<sup>114</sup> Finally, though palm oil arrived in the New World via the slave trade, this vegetable oil that has reigned in African cookery since around the Paleolithic Age never made it in American cuisine.<sup>115</sup> In Brazil, on the other hand, Africans used palm oil in a number of their dishes.<sup>116</sup>

To survive, the Americans would have to adopt the African staples of rice and cassava; they eventually did. As noted, the greatest pressure was on the poorer settlers. Burke remembered that he “had only \$3 in cash” when his family of six began its new life in Liberia in 1854.<sup>117</sup> His family quickly adapted to the local foods: “For four or five months after we arrived in Africa [...] my children were so fond of palm oil and rice, and eat so much [...] they fattened very fast.”<sup>118</sup>

While the well-to-do preferred imports, they did learn to savor African foods as well. In 1859, ex-president Joseph J. Roberts described how he and his entourage ate “dumboy,”<sup>119</sup> (a “native” dish

<sup>113</sup>A folklore from Central Africa recounts that “white man [...] brought maize and cassava and groundnuts and tobacco.” Kiple, and Ornelas (ed.) *Cambridge World History of Food* I, 182-83. Also James C. McCann, *Maize and Grace: Africa's Encounter with a New World Crop, 1500-2000* (Cambridge MA, 2005); William O. Jones, *Manioc in Africa* (Stanford CA, 1959); Michael Gomez, *Reversing Sail*, 213; Erik Gilbert, and Jonathan Reynolds, *Africa in World History: From Prehistory to the Present* (New Jersey, 2008), 165.

<sup>114</sup>Hilliard, *Hog Meat and Hoecake*, 92.

<sup>115</sup>Martin Lynn, *Commerce and Economic Change in West Africa: The Palm Oil Trade in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1997), 2.

<sup>116</sup>José Honório Rodrigues, “The Influence of Africa on Brazil and Of Brazil on Africa,” *Journal of African History* 3 (1962), 56.

<sup>117</sup>Wiley, *Slaves No More*, 191.

<sup>118</sup>Wiley, *Slaves No More*, 190.

<sup>119</sup>The origin of dumboy is described in the AR (1866), 280: “The name of the dish, so highly relished by some, and which we have corrupted into *Dumboy*, is from two words in the Bassa dialect, *dor*, a mortar and *bouy* cassava.” Dumboy is still pre-

derived from cassava) with “a hearty good will.”<sup>120</sup> Another occasion was in 1870 when five Americo-Liberians also lunched on dumboy, “prepared so nicely by Mrs. Capehart,” another Americo-Liberian. “The Dumboy, notwithstanding its singular name, is an excellent dish” one participant later wrote, “we Liberians would not exchange it for any foreign dishes [...]”<sup>121</sup> Those who ate Mrs. Capehart’s midday dumboy represented the Liberian elite. They included First Lady Mrs. Edward J. Roye, the spouse of ex-president Stephen Benson, and future Liberian president Garretson Gibson. The Capeharts lived in Virginia, a frontier town along a major trade route between the interior and the coast. Here, the Capeharts and other Americo-Liberians were surrounded by the Dei, a people for whom dumboy or one of its cassava variants, was a staple food. The Capehart household had almost certainly acquired the taste for dumboy from its African neighbors.

More tellingly was the Americo-Liberians’ adoption of rice as their number one food, even though corn was cultivated locally.<sup>122</sup> This change was significant in many ways. Most importantly, by preferring rice over corn the settlers shed a critical component of their *Americaness*, a critical step in the process of redefinition. Environmental conditions greatly enhanced the transition. Compared to rice, corn was a late comer to West Africa. It arrived several centuries after rice had been firmly established as the principal source of carbohydrates along the West African coast. Moreover, corn was (and still is) a minor crop in Liberia. Because corn has always been intercropped on small patches in rice fields, the grain never found its niche. When ripened corn was often a snack, roasted and eaten usually during the “hungry” months as farmers awaited the rice harvest. Hence, corn remains inconsequential in the diet of Liberians. The opposite is true for much of sub-Saharan Africans, since the various corn [maize] derived foods, such as the Kenyan *ugali*, constitute the staple in the region.<sup>123</sup> In the end, rice was produced abundantly by

pared by pounding cooked cassava in a mortar. The compact dough is cut into spoon-size pieces, soured in soup, and swallowed.

<sup>120</sup>Allen, “Rethinking History,” 442-43.

<sup>121</sup>AR (1870), 313.

<sup>122</sup>Annual Report (1830), 35; AR (1851), 330.

<sup>123</sup>McCann, *Maize and Grace*, Chapter 1.

the locals, and the Americans scarcely had alternatives; and some immigrants were already familiar with it.

Because convergence led to acculturation, indigenous people also learned to savor the transatlantic foodstuffs that Americo-Liberians introduced. Though Africa proved inhospitable to American crops and livestock, a few did survive. Among them were collard greens and cabbage. Collards—the headless “cabbage” as the English dubbed the leafy vegetable<sup>124</sup>—and cabbage were among the garden vegetables of the American South.<sup>125</sup> These plants became popular among blacks when some planters allowed their enslaved Africans to cultivate small vegetable plots. The “slave gardens” supplemented the monotonous diet of corn meal and pork that Africans received, but shifted the burden of provision to the already overexploited blacks.<sup>126</sup> Collards and cabbage became two of the leading vegetables in the “slave gardens.” Blacks must have been drawn to these leafy plants because they were reminiscent of the many “greens” used so frequently to make stews back in Africa.<sup>127</sup> Collards and cabbage were transplanted by the emigrants to their “back yard” gardens in Liberia.<sup>128</sup> Today, collard greens and cabbage dishes are relished by the indigenous Africans as well, and like all stews, both dishes are eaten together with rice.

Sexual union was another way in which settlers and locals interacted. For Americo-Liberian men, the ideal sexual union was intermarriage. Yet, the immigrant community clearly disapproved of such cross-cultural intimacy, supposedly out of concern that the primitive ways of the “natives” would desecrate Americo-Liberian homes. Clarence Simpson reminisced over the reaction of Americo-Liberians when his father, “the son of an American from Florida and grandson of a former president of Liberia” chose to wed a “young

<sup>124</sup>Karen Hess, *The South Carolina Rice Kitchen*, 70.

<sup>125</sup>E.g., Hilliard, *Hog Meat and Hoecake*, 30-31, 172-73.

<sup>126</sup>Hilliard, *Hog Meat and Hoecake*, 182.

<sup>127</sup>E.g., Gomez, *Reversing Sail*, 213; Gilbert and Reynolds, *Africa in World History*, 165.

<sup>128</sup>E.g., Wiley, *Slaves No More*, 135-37, 142, 144, 162; J.W. Lugenbeel, *Sketches of Liberia: Comprising A Brief Account of the Geography, Climate, Productions and diseases of the Republic of Liberia* (Washington, 1850), 17-18.



tribal girl,” called Kamah Grey. “Of course, my father fully expected that, in those days [...] there would be some raising of eyebrows, some shrugging of shoulders, some talk of the young teacher jeopardizing his career,” he explained.<sup>129</sup> In spite of social censure, the Simpson 1895 matrimony was just one of many that occurred throughout the next century. But indigenous people generally did not share similar idiosyncrasy about marrying Americo-Liberians.<sup>130</sup> Besides natural affection, some ethnic women viewed intermarriage as means to upward social mobility; they and their offspring would become “kwii” or “civilized.”<sup>131</sup>

While intermarriages were ideal, Americo-Liberian men chose sexual encounters that tended to be less conspicuous, such as liaisons, so as not to provoke the ire of their community. However, another practice, though not legal from the vantage of Americo-Liberians, appeared much more respectable, and hence, was seemingly tolerated. Padmore explains:

Customs in Liberia at the time were that farmers married an educated lady mainly to maintain his prestige with the civilized community. He could likewise have *as many native or farm wives* as he might find financially possible. [...] Some farmers had *two or three such wives who never mingle with his city home or family*. Besides, acquiring such farm women was considered a big gesture to the local tribal people of the area [...] [italics mine].<sup>132</sup>

This tradition is practically identical to the polygynous relationship maintained by Liberia’s indigenous societies, which explains their support for it. The one exception was that the Americo-Liberian husband’s permanent residence was not located in the same compound with those of his multiple wives, as was the case in regular polygy-

<sup>129</sup>Simpson, *Memoirs*, 70.

<sup>130</sup>E.g., Holsoe, and Herman, *A Land and Life Remembered*, 20-21.

<sup>131</sup>Gormah Kuteh, interview by William E. Allen, Palala, Liberia, 10 March 1999; record in possession of author. On definition and implications of being “kwii, see, Sonii David, “To Be Kwii is Good: A Personal Account of Research in a Kpelle Village,” *Liberian Studies Journal* 17 (1992), 203-15.

<sup>132</sup>Padmore, *Memoirs*, 25-26.

nous relationships. Yet, like local men, the Americo-Liberian provided for each household, living alternately in both.

Padmore's description was of the 1930s and 1940s. Nevertheless, this form of polygyny has its roots in the nineteenth-century. One source is the previously mentioned "half-towns" or "native towns." These were located on farms owned by Americo-Liberians. Eventually, the Americo-Liberian farmer constructed his "civilized" or Western home on the farm in the midst of the thatch huts owned by his laborers, where he spent weekends supervising the farm. He then chose a "country wife" from an adjacent village. Her duties included maintenance of the "half-town" or "native town" while her Americo-Liberian husband was away most of the time with his kwii family. This arrangement meant a bifurcated home for the Americo-Liberian husband, one "civilized" and the other "native." In the eyes of his community, the "civilized" or city home was legitimate and wholesome. Hence, it was accorded all rights and attributes of a family: for instance, recognition and inheritance rights. On the other hand, the "native" home was perceived as somewhat inorganic and illegitimate—i.e., "half" of a town. Accordingly, the offspring of the "native" wife were characterized as "outside children" by the larger Americo-Liberian community and in effect denied the same recognition and privileges enjoyed by the "inside" or "civilized" siblings.

The bifurcated home was part of the Liberian identity that was forged in the nineteenth century. It was neither wholly African nor American. Rather this form of sexual liaison was a product of the convergence of settler and indigenous cultures. It was a Liberian institution created by indigenous and settler societies, both highly patriarchal. Local men betrothed their daughters to Americo-Liberian men, at times to nurture beneficial relationships, such as the client-patron reciprocity that became a hallmark of twentieth-century Liberian politics. This form of betrothal has a long history on the West African coast, where African men married female relatives to resident European traders. Such "marriages," Northrup notes, "were a common way of creating strong ties between two extended families and were regularly used to strengthen commercial and political alliances."<sup>133</sup> The Liberian "country" wives too played the important

<sup>133</sup>David Northrup, *Africa's Discovery of Europe, 1450-1850* (New York, 2009), 71.

role of culture brokers, helping the Americo-Liberians adapt the African way of life, to learn the language and customs. This position brought power and status to her extended patriarchal family, which in turn gave its “Big Man” some advantages when negotiating with his Americo-Liberian in-law.

## VI

Intermingling in the larger Atlantic world likewise shaped the Liberian identity. The case of the astonishing ascend of the obscure Liberian coffee illustrates this point. The fact that coffee grew wild in Liberia helped to foster the notion that the plant was native. Many new settlers wrote of coffee trees growing luxuriantly on their land. Armistead Miller, whose plot was located in Monrovia, informed his family in the United States: “I was on my lot [...] and found [...] coffee trees [...]. Some of my trees have a good deal of coffee on them [...].”<sup>134</sup> Still, others believed that coffee was introduced to the Grain Coast by Portuguese mariners prior to the nineteenth century.<sup>135</sup> Portuguese agency seems more credible, considering that the “spontaneous growth” of coffee does not appear to have extended beyond the Liberian coast.

By the nineteenth century coffee was a primary cash crop in the Atlantic world. Rising demand in the second half of the century, following decades of falling prices, made the crop attractive. In the United States alone per capita consumption increased from 3 pounds in the 1830s to 5.5 pounds by 1850, and then jumped to 8 pounds by 1859. Such rise in consumption contributed to improved prices around the world. Thus, between 1861 and 1865, the price of coffee increased threefold, climbing from 14 cents to 42 cents per pound.<sup>136</sup> It was during this era that Liberia emerged as a coffee exporter, although cultivation can be traced back to the 1830s and 1840s. For instance, by 1843, settlers had planted 21,197 coffee trees.<sup>137</sup> Liberia began regular overseas trade in the 1855. Recorded coffee export for

<sup>134</sup>AR (1853), 126.

<sup>135</sup>AR (1842), 233; AR (1863), 180.

<sup>136</sup>Mark Pendergrast, *Uncommon Grounds: The History of Coffee and How it Transformed Our World* (New York, 1999), 46-48.

<sup>137</sup>Census, 394.

the first two decades totaled only 137,730 pounds. Sales rose incredibly within the next twenty years, reaching 5,600,000 by 1896.<sup>138</sup> Two events in the later period helped to catapult the obscure Liberian coffee to fame and fortune.

The first catalyst occurred in April 1876 when the reputable taxonomic institute, the Linnean Society of London, assigned the scientific nomenclature, *Coffea liberica*, to the Liberian coffee; this act lent weight to the argument that the plant was indigenous and hence a new species.<sup>139</sup> Three months later, the Liberian coffee on display at the United States Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia, was rewarded with a "Diploma" for "Superior Coffee." *Coffea liberica* was ranked with the top species: the citation noted that "Liberia coffee possesses all the strength of Rio, and all the fine aroma of Java or Mocha coffee."<sup>140</sup> Almost suddenly, Liberian coffee ascended to the top of the international coffee market.

In September 1876, The London African Times extolled the superior qualities of *Coffea liberica*, and expressed doubts that the famous "Coffea Arabica [...] will continue long to monopolize."<sup>141</sup> Asian coffee growers, along with competitors like Brazil and Venezuela, scurried to replace their local species with *Coffea liberica*.<sup>142</sup> In the United States plans were made to cultivate Liberian coffee in "Lower California and Florida."<sup>143</sup> English companies and Liberian coffee growers established partnerships which permitted the firms to legally operate coffee estates in the country.<sup>144</sup> And in 1876 a trader in Liverpool, England, awarded Liberian farmer M.J. Decoursey for "a ton of the best Liberian coffee." Decoursey received a monetary prize and a silver medal; inscribed on the medal were the words, "He that tilleth his land shall have plenty of

<sup>138</sup>M.B. Akpan, "The Liberian Economy in the Nineteenth Century: The State of Agriculture and Commerce," *Liberian Studies Journal* 6 (1975), 21.

<sup>139</sup>*The Popular Science Review*, London, July 1876, quoted in George Stockham and Edward Morris, *Liberia Coffee* (Philadelphia, 1887), 12.

<sup>140</sup>Stockham and Morris, *Liberia Coffee*, 10.

<sup>141</sup>*The (London) African Times*, 16 September 1876, quoted in AR (1877), 21-23.

<sup>142</sup>AR (1877), 21-23; Annual Report (1879), 11.

<sup>143</sup>*The (London) African Times*, 16 September 1876, quoted in AR (1877), 21-23.

<sup>144</sup>Cited in Allen, "Historical Methodology," 27.

bread.”<sup>145</sup> But the fortune of *Coffea liberica* was brief. After the 1870s, price tumbled precipitously. By the turn of the century, most farmers had abandoned their coffee groves. Intense foreign competition, among others, contributed to the decline.

A final illustration of how circumstances in the Atlantic world converged and informed Liberian history has to do with the 1847 constitution. That constitution, with its rhetoric of “natural and inalienable rights,” has its roots in the late eighteenth-century political revolutions that rocked the Atlantic world. Those insurrections overturned undemocratic regimes in what became the United States, France, and Haiti and gave birth to the novel ideals that liberty and equality were natural rights. The language of liberty and equality in each declaration is basically similar: in 1776 the United States declared that “all men are created equal;” on 26 August 1789, revolutionary France proclaimed that “men are born and remain free and equal in rights;” and in 1804 after a bloody victory over French slaveholders, Haiti’s Declaration of Independence guaranteed “it will forever ensure liberty’s reign in the country of our birth.”<sup>146</sup> The striking parallel in these documents confirms the interconnectedness of the Atlantic world.<sup>147</sup> Accordingly, it was natural that Liberia’s 1847 Declaration of Independence followed, practically verbatim, the Atlantic model: “We recognize in all men certain natural and inalienable rights [...] life, liberty [...]”<sup>148</sup> Yet, although Liberia’s Declaration was identical to those of the earlier Atlantic revolutions, the constitution that followed contained a local, peculiar ingredient: it barred whites from citizenship and the acquisition of property in Liberia. Certainly, the prohibition was a paradox in the context of Atlantic history. In the Atlantic world, it was the white power structure that customarily promulgated segregation laws to the disadvantage of blacks.

<sup>145</sup>Allen, “Historical Methodology,” 29.

<sup>146</sup>Laurent Dubois, and John Garrigus, *Slave Revolution in the Caribbean 1789-1804: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston, 2006), 188.

<sup>147</sup>See Linebaugh and Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra*, e.g., Chapter 7.

<sup>148</sup>See constitution of 1847. After Teage’s death, some admirers, including the American Consul-General to Liberia, a white man named Abraham Hanson, endeavored to build a monument in honor of the “Jefferson of Liberia.” AR, 1865, 181-83.

## VII

The analytical model of convergence employed by Atlantic historians can clarify and expand interpretations in Liberian historiography. Liberia was part of the multicultural, nineteenth-century Atlantic community. Extensive intermingling in the region resulted in the development of some shared values. Liberia's social history was influenced by these interactions. Local realities also played an important role in the making of Liberian history. Interactions between settlers and indigenes likewise resulted in acculturation, a mutual exchange of culture.

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