

Liberian History

Liberia, officially the Republic of Liberia, is a country on the west coast of Africa bordered by Sierra Leone, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, and the Atlantic Ocean. Liberia has a hot equatorial climate with most rainfall arriving in summer with harsh harmattan winds in the dry season. Liberia's populated Pepper Coast is composed of mostly mangrove forests while the sparse inland is forested, later opening to a plateau of drier grasslands. Since 1989, Liberia has been in a state of flux witnessing two civil wars, the First Liberian Civil War (1989–1996), and the Second Liberian Civil War (1999–2003), displacing hundreds of thousands of people and devastating the country's economy.

The name Liberia denotes "liberty" as Black Americans moved to Liberia in 1822, who founded the country in 1847 with the support of the American Colonization Society creating a new ethnic group called the Americo-Liberians. However, this introduction of a new ethnic mix compounded ethnic tensions with the sixteen other main ethnicities.

History of Liberia

Anthropological research shows the region of Liberia was inhabited at least as far back as the 12th century, perhaps earlier. Mende speaking people expanded westward, forcing many smaller ethnic groups southward towards the Atlantic ocean. The Deys, Bassa, Kru, Gola and Gissi were some of the earliest recorded arrivals. This influx was compounded during the ancient decline of the Western Sudanic Mali Empire in 1375 and later in 1591 with the Songhai Empire. Additionally, inland regions underwent desertification, and inhabitants were pressured to move to the wetter Pepper Coast. These new inhabitants brought skills such as cotton spinning, cloth weaving, iron smelting, rice and sorghum cultivation, and social and political institutions from the Mali and Songhay Empires.

Shortly after the Manes conquered the region there was a migration of the Vai people into the region of Grand Cape Mount. The Vai were part of the Mali Empire who were forced to migrate when the empire collapsed in the fourteenth century. The Vai chose to migrate to the coastal region. The ethnic Kru opposed the migration of the Vai into their region. An alliance of the Manes and Kru were able to stop the further migration of the Vai but the Vai remained in the Grand Cape Mount region (where the city of Robertsport is now located).

Littoral coast people built canoes and traded with other West Africans from Cap-Vert to the Gold Coast. Later European traders would barter various commodities and goods with local people, sometimes hoisting their canoes aboard. When the Kru began trading with Europeans, they initially traded in non-slave commodities but later became active participants in the African slave trade. Kru laborers left their territory to work on plantations and in construction as paid laborers. Some even worked building the Suez and Panama Canals. Another tribal group in the area was the Glebo. The Glebo were driven, as a result of the Manes invasion, to migrate to the coast of what later became Liberia.

Early European contacts: Between 1461 and late seventeenth century, Portuguese, Dutch and British traders had contacts and trading posts in Liberia. The Portuguese had named the area Costa da Pimenta, later translated as Grain Coast, because of the abundance of grains of melegueta pepper.

Settlers from the United States: In 1822, the American Colonization Society established Liberia

as a place to send black people who were formerly enslaved. Other African Americans, who were never enslaved, chose to emigrate to Liberia as well. African-Americans gradually migrated to the colony and became known as Americo-Liberians, from where many present day Liberians trace their ancestry. On July 26, 1847, the Americo-Liberian settlers declared the independence of the Republic of Liberia.

The settlers regarded Africa as a "Promised Land", but they did not integrate into an African society. Once in Africa, they referred to themselves as "Americans" and were recognized as such by local Africans and by British colonial authorities in neighboring Sierra Leone. The symbols of their state — its flag, motto, and seal — and the form of government that they chose reflected their American background and diaspora experience. Lincoln University (founded as Ashmun Institute for educating young blacks in Pennsylvania in 1854) played an important role in supplying Americo-Liberians leadership for the new Nation. The first graduating class of Lincoln University, James R. Amos, his brother Thomas H. Amos, and Armistead Miller sailed for Liberia on the brig Mary C. Stevens in April, 1859 after graduation.

The religious practices, social customs and cultural standards of the Americo-Liberians had their roots in the antebellum American South. These ideals strongly influenced the attitudes of the settlers toward the indigenous African people. The new nation, as they perceived it, was coextensive with the settler community and with those Africans who were assimilated into it. Mutual mistrust and hostility between the "Americans" along the coast and the "Natives" of the interior was a recurrent theme in the country's history, along with (usually successful) attempts by the Americo-Liberian minority to dominate what they identified as savage native peoples. They named the land "Liberia," which in the Romance languages, and in Latin in particular, means "Land of the Free," as an homage to their freedom from slavery.

Joseph Jenkins Roberts, First President of Liberia. Historically, Liberia has enjoyed the support and unofficial cooperation of the United States government. Liberia's government, modeled after that of the United States, was democratic in structure, if not always in substance. After 1877 the True Whig Party monopolized political power in the country, and competition for office was usually contained within the party, whose nomination virtually ensured election. Two problems confronting successive administrations were pressure from neighboring colonial powers, Britain and France, and the threat of financial insolvency, both of which challenged the country's sovereignty. Liberia retained its independence during the Scramble for Africa, but lost its claim to extensive territories that were annexed by Britain and France. Economic development was hindered by the decline of markets for Liberian goods in the late nineteenth century and by indebtedness on a series of loans, payments on which drained the economy.

President Edwin Barclay and President Franklin D. Roosevelt during World War II, 1943

Significant mid-twentieth century events:

Two events were of particular importance in releasing Liberia from its self-imposed isolation. The first was the grant in 1926 of a large concession to the American-owned Firestone Plantation Company; that move became a first step in the (limited) modernization of the Liberian economy. The second occurred during World War II, when the United States began providing technical and economic assistance that enabled Liberia to make economic progress and introduce social change. In a late night raid on April 12, 1980, a successful military coup was staged by a group of noncommissioned army officers led by Master Sergeant Samuel Kanyon Doe. The soldiers were a mixture of the various ethnic groups that had claimed marginalization from the hands of the minority Americo-Liberian settlers. They killed William R. Tolbert, Jr., who had been president for nine years, in his mansion. Constituting themselves the People's Redemption Council, Doe and

his associates seized control of the government and brought an end to Africa's first republic. Significantly, Doe was the first Liberian head of state who was not a member of the Americo-Liberian elite. In the early 1980s, the United States provided Liberia more than \$500 million for pushing the Soviet Union out of the country, and for providing the US exclusive rights to use Liberia's ports and land (including allowing the CIA to use Liberian territory to spy on Libya).

Doe favored authoritarian policies, banning newspapers and outlawing various opposition parties. His tactic was to brand popular opposition parties as "socialist", and therefore illegal according to the Liberian constitution, while allowing less popular minor parties to remain as a token opposition. Unfortunately for Doe, popular support would then tend to realign behind one of these smaller parties, causing them to be labeled "socialist" in their turn.

In October 1985, Liberia held the first post-coup elections, ostensibly to legitimize Doe's regime. Virtually all international observers agreed that the Liberia Action Party (LAP) led by Jackson Doe (no relation) had won the election by a clear margin. After a week of counting the votes, however, Samuel Doe fired the count officials and replaced them with his own Special Election Committee (SECOM), which announced that Samuel Doe's ruling National Democratic Party of Liberia had won with 50.9% of the vote. In response, on November 12 a counter-coup was launched by Thomas Quiwonkpa, whose soldiers briefly occupied the Executive Mansion and the national radio station, with widespread support throughout the country. Three days later, Quiwonkpa's coup was overthrown. Following this failed coup, government repression intensified, as Doe's troops killed more than 2000 civilians and imprisoned more than 100 opposing politicians, including Jackson Doe, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf and BBC journalist Isaac Bantu.

1989 and 2003 civil wars:

In late 1989, a civil war began. The harsh dictatorial atmosphere that gripped the country was due in large part to Sergeant Samuel Doe's rule. An Americo-Liberian named Charles Taylor with the backing of neighboring countries such as Burkina Faso and Cote d'Ivoire entered Nimba County with around 100 men. These fighters gained high levels of support with the local population who were disillusioned with their present government. A large section of the country came under the invaders' control as a result. By this time a new player had also emerged. Yormie Prince Johnson (former ally of Taylor) had formed his own army and had gained tremendous support from the Gio and Mano ethnic groups.

In August 1990, the Economic Community Monitoring Group under the Economic Community of West African States organized its own military task force to intervene in the crisis. The troops were largely from Nigeria, Guinea and Ghana. After the meeting and on his way out, Doe who was traveling only with his personal staff, was ambushed and captured by members of the Gio Tribe who were loyal to Prince Yormie Johnson. The soldiers took him to the headquarters of Johnson in neighboring Caldwell, tortured and killed him. By this time Taylor was a prominent warlord and leader of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia. After some prompting from Taylor that the Nigerians and Ghanains were opposed to him, Senagalese troops were brought in with some financial support from the United States. Their service was however short lived, after a major confrontation with Taylor forces.

By September 1990 Doe's forces controlled only a small area just outside the capital of Monrovia. After his death, and as a condition for the end of the conflict, interim president Amos Sawyer resigned in 1994, handing power to the Council of State. Taylor was elected as President in 1997, after leading a bloody insurgency backed by Libyan President Muammar al-Gaddafi. Taylor's brutal regime targeted several leading opposition and political activists. In 1998, the government sought to assassinate child rights activist Kimmie Weeks for a report he had published on its

involvement in the training of child soldiers, which forced him into exile. Taylor's autocratic and dysfunctional government led to a new rebellion in 1999. More than 200,000 people are estimated to have been killed in the civil wars.

The conflict intensified in mid-2003, and the fighting moved into Monrovia. A hastily assembled force of 1000 Nigerian troops, the ECOWAS Mission In Liberia (ECOMIL) was airlifted into Liberia on August 15, 2003 to prevent the rebels from over running the capital city and committing revenge inspired war crimes.

As the power of the government shrank and with increasing international and American pressure for him to resign, President Taylor accepted an asylum offer from Nigeria, but vowed: "God willing, I will be back." On March 29, 2006 he was extradited from Nigeria to Sierra Leone, where he had been indicted by the Special Court (a war crimes tribunal). Charles Taylor's trial by that court is being held in the Hague, for security. He is charged with crimes against humanity, violations of the Geneva Conventions and "other serious violations of international humanitarian law". Some of the ECOMIL troops were subsequently withdrawn and at least two battalions incorporated into the 15,000 strong United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) peace keeping force.

Transitional government and elections:

After the exile of Taylor, Gyude Bryant was appointed Chairman of the transitional government in late 2003. Because of failures of the Transitional Government in curbing corruption, Liberia signed onto GEMAP, a novel anti-corruption program. The primary task of the transitional government was to prepare for fair and peaceful democratic elections. With UNMIL troops safeguarding the peace, Liberia successfully conducted presidential elections in the fall of 2005. Twenty three candidates stood for the October 11, 2005 general election, with the early favorite George Weah, internationally famous footballer, UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador and member of the Kru ethnic group expected to dominate the popular vote. No candidate took the required majority in the general election, so that a run-off between the top two vote getters, Weah and Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, was necessary. The November 8, 2005 presidential runoff election was won decisively by Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, a Harvard-trained economist. Both the general election and runoff were marked by peace and order, with thousands of Liberians waiting patiently in the Liberian heat to cast their ballots.

Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf presidency:

Daughter of the first indigenous Liberian to be elected to the national legislature, Jahmale Carney Johnson, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf was born in rural Liberia. Widely celebrated for being the first elected female head of state in Africa, Johnson-Sirleaf's election focused much international attention on Liberia. A former Citibank and World Bank employee, Johnson-Sirleaf's career also includes heading the U.N. Development Programme for Africa. Johnson-Sirleaf was jailed twice during the Doe administration before escaping and going into exile. As president, Johnson-Sirleaf hopes to bring her credentials as an economist to bear and enlist the help of the international community in rebuilding Liberia's economy and infrastructure. Her efforts to have Liberia's external debt of \$3.5 billion cancelled were at least partially rewarded on November 12, 2007, when the IMF agreed to begin providing debt relief. She has extended a special invitation to the Nigerian business community to participate in business opportunities in Liberia, in part as thanks for Nigeria's help in securing Liberia's peace. Exiled Liberians are also investing in the country and participating in Liberia's rebuilding efforts.

In addition to focusing her early efforts to restore basic services like water and electricity to the capital of Monrovia, Johnson-Sirleaf has established a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to address crimes committed during the later stages of Liberia's long civil war. She is also working to re-establish Liberia's food independence. Johnson-Sirleaf also requested that Nigeria extradite accused war criminal and profiteer Charles Taylor. Addressing graduating students at the 2008 commencement ceremony at Dartmouth College, Johnson-Sirleaf stated that Liberia is on "a new path" and pledged to "build the institutions of justice, human rights and participatory democracy, strong systems of governance in which rights are respected and institutions serve the public good and natural resources are used for the benefit of all.

Human rights situation:

Amnesty International summarizes in its Annual Report 2006: "Sporadic outbreaks of violence continued to threaten prospects of peace. Former rebel fighters who should have been disarmed and demobilized protested violently when they did not receive benefits. Slow progress in reforming the police, judiciary and the criminal justice system resulted in systematic violations of due process and vigilante violence against criminal suspects. Laws establishing an Independent National Commission on Human Rights and a Truth and Reconciliation Commission were adopted. Over 200,000 internally displaced people and refugees returned to their homes, although disputes over land and property appropriated during the war raised ethnic tensions. UN sanctions on the trade in diamonds and timber were renewed. Those responsible for human rights abuses during the armed conflict continued to enjoy impunity. The UN Security Council gave peacekeeping forces in Liberia powers to arrest former President Taylor and transfer him to the Special Court for Sierra Leone if he should return from Nigeria, where he continued to receive asylum. Liberia made a commitment to abolish capital punishment. A new law on rape, which initially proposed imposition of the death penalty for gang rape, was amended to provide a maximum penalty of life imprisonment." Former 22nd president Charles Taylor was later captured trying to escape across the border of Cameroon and has been sent to the International Criminal Court in The Hague for trial.

Politics of Liberia

Liberia has a dual system of statutory law based on Anglo-American common law for the modern sector and customary unwritten law for the native sector for exclusively rural tribes. Liberia's modern sector has three equal branches of government in the constitution, though in practice the executive branch headed by President of Liberia is the strongest of the three. Following the dissolution of the Republican Party in 1876, the True Whig Party dominated the Liberian government until the 1980 coup. Currently, no party has majority control of the legislature. The longest serving president in Liberian history was William Tubman, serving from 1944 until his death in 1971. The shortest term was held by James Skivring Smith, who controlled the government for two months. However, the political process from Liberia's founding in 1847, despite widespread corruption, was very stable until the end of the First Republic in 1980.

Geography of Liberia

Liberia is situated in West Africa, bordering the North Atlantic Ocean to the country's southwest. The landscape is characterized by mostly flat to rolling coastal plains, which rise to a rolling plateau and low mountains in the northeast. The equatorial climate is hot year-round with heavy rainfall from May to October with a short two-week interlude in August. During the winter months of November to March dry dust-laden harmatta winds blow inland causing many problems for

residents.

Liberia's watershed tends to move in a southwestern pattern towards the sea as new rains move down the forested plateau off the inland mountain range of Guinée Forestière, in Guinea. The country's main northwestern boundary is traversed by the Mano River while its southeast limits are bounded by the river Cavalla. Liberia's three largest rivers are St. Paul exiting near Monrovia, the river St. John at Buchanan and the Cestos River, all of which flow into the Atlantic.

Liberia's highest point is Mount Wuteve at 1440 meters (4,724 ft) above sea level in the northwestern Liberia range of the West Africa Mountains and the Guinea Highlands. However, Mount Nimba near Yekepa, is taller at 1,752 meters (5,748 ft) above sea level but is not wholly within Liberia as Nimba shares a border with Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast) and is their tallest mountain as well.

Counties and districts: Liberia is divided into 15 counties, which are subdivided into districts, and further subdivided into clans. The counties are:

1. **Bomi**
2. **Bong**
3. **Gbarpolu**
4. **Grand Bassa**
5. **Grand Cape Mount**
6. **Grand Gedeh**
7. **Grand Kru**
8. **Lofa**
9. **Margibi**
10. **Maryland**
11. **Montserrado**
12. **Nimba**
13. **River Cess**
14. **River Gee**
15. **Sinoe**

Economy of Liberia

Historically, the Liberian economy depended heavily on iron ore and rubber exports, foreign direct investment, as well as the export of its other natural resources, such as timber. Foreign trade was primarily conducted for the benefit of the Americo-Liberian elite, with trade between foreigners and indigenous Liberians severely restricted throughout most of its history by the 1864 Ports of Entry Act. Little foreign direct investment benefited the 95% majority population, who were often subjected to forced labor on foreign concessions. Liberian law often did not protect indigenous Liberians from the extraction of rents and arbitrary taxation, with the majority surviving on subsistence farming and low wage work on foreign concessions.

While official export figures for commodities declined during the 1990's civil war as many investors fled, Liberia's wartime economy featured the exploitation of the region's diamond wealth, with the country acting as a major trader in Liberian, Sierra Leonian and Angolan conflict diamonds, exporting over \$300 million in diamonds annually. More recently, the UN ban on Liberian diamond exports as well as the enforcement of the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme by international diamond traders has effectively shut down Liberia's diamond industry, (although there were fears that foreign traders are hoarding the country's diamonds during the

ban). On April 27, 2007 the UN voted unanimously to rescind the ban in recognition of advances in Liberian efforts to ensure that diamonds are mined legally.

Timber, iron ore, rubber, and other commodity exports continued during the war, in part due to illicit agreements struck between Liberia's warlords and foreign concessionaires. Looting and war profiteering destroyed nearly the entire infrastructure of the country, such that the Monrovia capital was without running water and electricity (except for fuel-powered generators) by the time the first elected post-war government began to institute development and reforms in 2006. Although some official exporting and legitimate business activity resumed once the hostilities ended (for instance, Liberia signed a new deal with steel giant Mittal for the export of iron ore in summer 2005), as of mid-2006 Liberia is dependent on foreign aid, and carries a debt overhang of \$3.5 billion.

Liberia currently has an approximate 85% unemployment rate, the second highest in the world. The Liberia dollar currently trades against the US dollar at a ratio of 57:1. Liberia used the US dollar as its currency from 1943 until it reversed dollarization in 1982. Its external debt (\$3.5 billion) is huge in comparison to its GDP (approx \$2.5 billion/year); it annually imports approximately \$4.839 billion in goods while it exports only about \$910 million. Inflation is falling, but still significant (dropping from 15% in 2003 to 4.9% in the 3rd quarter of 2005); interest rates are high, with the average lending rate listed by the Central Bank of Liberia at 17.6% for 3rd quarter 2005 (although the average time deposit rate was only .4%, and CD rate only 4.4%, barely keeping pace with inflation). It continues to suffer with poor economic performance due to a fragile security situation, the devastation wrought by its long war, its lack of infrastructure, and necessary human capital to help the country recover from the scourges of conflict and corruption.

In 2005, a lawsuit was brought by the International Labour Rights Fund against the company Bridgestone/Firestone for its alleged role in using child labour in its rubber plantations in Liberia and abusing the environment. Workers also briefly staged a strike at the company's million-acre (4,000 km²) plantation at Harbel in early 2006, but the strike could not be sustained by the poorly funded labour union. However, an international campaign called Stop Firestone is actively campaigning to pressure the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company to change its policies.

Liberia has one of the world's largest national registries of ships, due to its status as a "flag of convenience".

According to the managing-director of Liberia's National Port Authority, Togba Ngangana, Chinese investors have signed a memorandum of understanding to build a manufacturing zone outside the southern port of Buchanan which would produce 50,000 jobs. This is in addition to an undisclosed amount of low-interest loans, debt relief and other incentives.

Demographics of Liberia

The population of over 3 million comprises 16 indigenous ethnic groups and various foreign minorities. Indigenous peoples comprise about 85% of the population, the largest of which are the Kpelle in central and western Liberia. Americo-Liberians, who are descendants of African-Americans and Carribean-Americans (some of which were freed slaves that arrived in Liberia as of 1821), make up an estimated 15% of the population, of whom half from US origin and half from the Caribbean. There also is a sizable number of Lebanese, Indians, and other West African nationals who make up a significant part of Liberia's business community. A few whites (estimated at 18,000 in 1999; probably fewer now) reside in the country.

As of 2006, Liberia has the highest population growth rate in the world (4.50%). Similar to its neighbors, it has a large youth population, with half of the population being under the age of 18.

Culture of Liberia

Liberia was traditionally noted for its hospitality, academic institutions, cultural skills, and arts/craft works— Liberia has a long, rich history in textile arts and quilting. The free and former US slaves who emigrated to Liberia brought with them their sewing and quilting skills. The 1843 Liberian census indicated a variety of occupations, including hatter, milliner, seamstress and tailor. Liberia hosted National Fairs in 1857 and 1858 in which prizes were awarded for various needle arts. One of the most well-known Liberian quilters was Martha Ann Ricks, who presented a quilt featuring the famed Liberian coffee tree to Queen Victoria in 1892.

In modern times, Liberian presidents would present quilts as official government gifts. The John F. Kennedy Library and Museum collection includes a cotton quilt by Mrs. Jemima Parker which has portraits of both Liberian president William Tubman and JFK. Zariah Wright-Titus founded the Arthington (Liberia) Women's Self-Help Quilting Club (1987). In the early 1990s, Kathleen Bishop documented examples of appliquéd Liberian quilts. When current Liberian President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf moved into the Executive Mansion, she reportedly had a Liberian-made quilt installed in her presidential office.

The tallest man-made structure of Africa, the mast of former Paynesville Omega transmitter is situated in Liberia.

Education in Liberia

The University of Liberia is located in Monrovia. Opened in 1862, it is one of Africa's oldest institutes of higher learning. Civil war severely damaged the university in the 1990s, but the university has begun to rebuild following the restoration of peace.

Cuttington University was established by the Episcopal Church of the USA (ECUSA) in 1889; its campus is currently located in Suakoko, Bong County (120 miles north of Monrovia).

According to statistics published by UNESCO for 2004 65% of primary-school age and 24% of secondary-school age children were enrolled in school. This is a significant increase on previous years, the statistics also show substantial numbers of older children going back to earlier school years.

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UNESCO Schooling data

Part II

Lying on the Atlantic in the southern part of West Africa, Liberia is bordered by Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Côte d'Ivoire. It is comparable in size to Tennessee. Most of the country is a plateau covered by dense tropical forests, which thrive under an annual rainfall of about 160 in. a year.

Government: Republic

History

Africa's first republic, Liberia was founded in 1822 as a result of the efforts of the American Colonization Society to settle freed American slaves in West Africa. The society contended that the immigration of blacks to Africa was an answer to the problem of slavery as well as to what it felt was the incompatibility of the races. Over the course of forty years, about 12,000 slaves were voluntarily relocated. Originally called Monrovia, the colony became the Free and Independent Republic of Liberia in 1847.

The English-speaking Americo-Liberians, descendants of former American slaves, make up only 5% of the population but have historically dominated the intellectual and ruling class. Liberia's indigenous population is composed of 16 different ethnic groups.

The government of Africa's first republic was modeled after that of the United States, and Joseph Jenkins Roberts of Virginia was elected the first president. Ironically, Liberia's constitution denied indigenous Liberians equal rights with the lighter-skinned American emigrants and their descendants.

After 1920, considerable progress was made toward opening up the interior, a process that was speeded up in 1951 by the establishment of a 43-mile (69-km) railroad to the Bomi Hills from Monrovia. In July 1971, while serving his sixth term as president, William V. S. Tubman died following surgery and was succeeded by his longtime associate, Vice President William R. Tolbert, Jr.

Tolbert was ousted in a military coup on April 12, 1980, by Master Sgt. Samuel K. Doe, backed by the U.S. government. Doe's rule was characterized by corruption and brutality. A rebellion led by Charles Taylor, a former Doe aide, and the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), started in Dec. 1989; the following year, Doe was assassinated. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) negotiated with the government and the rebel factions and attempted to restore order, but the civil war raged on. By April 1996, factional fighting by the country's warlords had destroyed any last vestige of normalcy and civil society. The civil war finally ended in 1997.

In what was considered by international observers to be a free election, Charles Taylor won 75% of the presidential vote in July 1997. The country had next to no health care system, and the

capital was without electricity and running water. Taylor supported Sierra Leone's brutal Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in the hopes of toppling his neighbor's government and in exchange for diamonds, which enriched his personal coffers. As a consequence, the UN issued sanctions.

In 2002, rebels—Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD)—intensified their attacks on Taylor's government. By June 2003, LURD and other rebel groups controlled two-thirds of the country. Finally, on Aug. 11, Taylor stepped down and went into exile in Nigeria. Gyude Bryant, a businessman seen as a coalition builder, was selected by the various factions as the new president. By the time he was exiled, Taylor had bankrupted his own country, siphoning off \$100 million. According to the New York Times, Taylor left Liberia the world's poorest nation. In 2004, international donors promised more than \$500 million in aid.

In a Nov. 2005 presidential run-off election, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, a Harvard-educated economist who had worked at the World Bank, defeated George Weah, a former world-class soccer star. In Jan. 2006 she became Africa's first female president. In 2006, former president Taylor, in exile in Nigeria, was turned over to an international court in the Hague to face trial on charges of crimes against humanity for supporting rebel troops in Sierra Leone's brutal civil war that claimed the lives of about 300,000 people in the 1990s. Taylor refused to appear in court when his trial opened in June 2007. His trial resumed in January 2008.