History of Liberia

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[**Liberia**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberia) is a country in [West Africa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Africa) which was founded, established, colonized, and controlled by citizens of the [United States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States) and ex-Caribbean slaves as a colony for former [African American slaves](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavery_in_the_United_States) and their free black descendants. It is one of only two sovereign countries in the world that were started by citizens and ex-Caribbean slaves of a political power as a colony for former slaves of the same political power, the other being [Sierra Leone](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sierra_Leone), established by [Great Britain](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Empire). In 1847, Liberia proclaimed its independence from the [American Colonization Society](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Colonization_Society) (ACS).

Liberia was under control and as [protectorate](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protectorate) of United States. It retained its independence throughout the [Scramble for Africa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scramble_for_Africa) by European colonial powers during the late 19th century, and the country remained in the American sphere of influence. Up until 1980, Liberia was dominated by the small minority of descendants of the free black colonists, known collectively as [Americo-Liberians](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Americo-Liberians). Little economic development occurred. From the 1920s, the country became dependent on exploitation of natural resources, particularly the rubber industry and the [Firestone Company](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Firestone_Tire_and_Rubber_Company).

Early history (pre 1821)



Map of Liberia circa 1830

Historians believe that many of the [indigenous peoples](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indigenous_peoples) of Liberia migrated there from the north and east between the 12th and 16th centuries AD. Portuguese explorers established contacts with people of the land later known as "Liberia" as early as 1462. They named the area *Costa da Pimentia* ([Pepper Coast](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pepper_Coast)) or [Grain Coast](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grain_Coast) because of the abundance of [melegueta pepper](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aframomum_melegueta). In 1602 the Dutch established a trading post at [Grand Cape Mount](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_Cape_Mount) but destroyed it a year later. In 1663, the British installed trading posts on the [Pepper Coast](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pepper_Coast). No further known settlements by non-African colonists occurred along the [Grain Coast](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grain_Coast) (an alternative name) until the arrival in 1821 of free blacks from the United States.

Colonization (1821–1847)

*Main article:*[*American Colonization Society*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Colonization_Society)

From around 1800, in the United States, people opposed to slavery were planning ways to achieve manumission of more slaves and, ultimately, to abolish the institution. At the same time, slaveholders in the South opposed having free blacks in their midst, as they believed the free people threatened the stability of their slave societies. While mostly freed across the North, former slaves and free blacks suffered considerable discrimination, and some territories and states in the Northwest prohibited migration by free people of color.

Some abolitionists and slaveholders discussed the idea of setting up a colony in Africa as a place to relocate [freed](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manumission) African-American slaves. They also tried to recruit colonists from among populations of free blacks and free people of color. Most opposed relocation, as they had been born and had claims to the United States.

The first ship, *Mayflower of Liberia* (formerly *Elizabeth*), departed New York on February 6, 1820, for West Africa carrying 86 settlers. Between 1821 and 1838, the American Colonization Society developed the first settlement, which would be known as Liberia. On July 26, 1847, it declared its independence.

**First ideas of colonization**

As early as the period of the [American Revolution](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Revolution), many white members of American society thought that African Americans could not succeed in living in their society as free people. Some considered blacks physically and mentally inferior to whites, and others believed that the racism and societal polarization resulting from slavery were insurmountable obstacles for integration of the races. [Thomas Jefferson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Jefferson) was among those who proposed colonization in Africa: relocating free blacks outside the new nation.

**Growing numbers of free blacks**

After 1783 the ranks of [free blacks](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_black) expanded markedly. Northern states abolished slavery, some on a schedule of gradual abolition that kept adults enslaved until the 1840s in New York and New Jersey. In addition, some slaveholders were inspired by the ideals of the [Revolutionary War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Revolutionary_War) and [freed](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manumission) their slaves, often by will at the owner's death. The number of free blacks increased markedly in the South, especially in the Upper South where changing agriculture reduced the need for slave labor. In addition, Quaker, Methodist and Baptist preachers were active in those years encouraging slaveholders to free their slaves. The Northeast states abolished slavery following the war, generally on a graduated basis where it was still economically viable, as in the mid-Atlantic states.

In 1800 and 1802, slave rebellions occurred (see [Gabriel’s rebellion](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gabriel_Prosser#Gabriel.27s_Rebellion)) in Virginia, and were brutally suppressed by slaveholders. Some planters feared that free blacks would encourage slaves to run away or revolt. From 1782–1810, the percentage of free blacks in the [Upper South](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Upper_South) increased from less than one percent to 13.5%. In the nation as a whole, the number of free people of color also increased. In 1790, there were 59,467 free blacks, out of a total U.S. population of almost four million and a total black U.S. population of 800,000. By 1800, there were 108,378 free blacks in a population of 7.2 million. These factors significantly influenced the popularity of the concept of colonization as a solution to the "problem " of free blacks.

**Colonies in Africa**



Paul Cuffee in 1812.

In 1787, Britain had started to resettle the Black Poor of London in the colony of [Freetown](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freetown) in modern-day [Sierra Leone](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sierra_Leone). Many were [Black Loyalists](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Loyalists), former American slaves who had been freed in exchange for their services during the American Revolution. The Crown also offered resettlement to former slaves whom they had first resettled in [Nova Scotia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nova_Scotia). The Black Loyalists there found both the discrimination and climate hard to bear. Wealthy African-American shipowner [Paul Cuffee](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Cuffee) thought that colonization was worth supporting. Aided by support from certain members of Congress and British officials, he conveyed 38 American Blacks to Freetown in 1816 at his own expense. He died in 1817, but his private initiative helped arouse public interest in the idea of colonization.

The [American Colonization Society](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Colonization_Society) (ACS) was founded in 1817 by Virginia politician [Charles F. Mercer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_F._Mercer) and Presbyterian minister [Robert Finley](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Finley) of New Jersey. The goal of the ACS was to settle free blacks outside of the United States; its method was to help them relocate to Africa.

From January 1820, the ACS sent ships from New York to West Africa. The first had 88 free black emigrants and three white ACS agents on board. The agents were to find an appropriate area for a settlement. Additional ACS representatives arrived in the [second ACS ship *Nautilus*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Colonization_Society#Second_ship:the_Nautilus). In December 1821, they acquired [Cape Mesurado](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cape_Mesurado), a 36-mile long strip of land near present-day [Monrovia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monrovia), from the indigenous ruler King Peter (perhaps with some threat of force).

From the beginning, the colonists were attacked by indigenous peoples whose territory this was, such as the [Malinké](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mandinka_people) tribes. In addition, they suffered from disease, the harsh climate, lack of food and medicine, and poor housing conditions.

Up until 1835, five more colonies were started by American state colonization societies, and one by the U.S. government, all in the area of the ACS settlement. The first colony on Cape Mesurado was extended, along the coast as well as inland, sometimes by use of force against the native tribes. In 1838 these colonies came together to create the Commonwealth of Liberia. [Monrovia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monrovia) would be named the capital. By 1842, four of the other American state colonies were incorporated into Liberia, and one was destroyed by indigenous people. The colonists of African-American descent became known as [Americo-Liberians](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Americo-Liberian). Many were of mixed-race including European ancestry. They were distinct as African Americans in their education, religion and culture and they did not identify with the indigenous, non-Christian peoples.

**Handing over command to Americo-Liberians**

The ACS administrators gradually gave the maturing colony more self-governance. In 1839, it was renamed the Commonwealth of Liberia; in 1841 the Commonwealth's first black Governor, [J.J. Roberts](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Jenkins_Roberts), was appointed. By the 1840s, the ACS was effectively bankrupt; Liberia had become a financial burden for it. In 1846, the ACS directed the Americo-Liberians to proclaim their independence. In 1847, Roberts proclaimed the colony the free and independent republic of Liberia. It then counted some 3000 settlers. Representatives drew up a constitution, modeled after that of the United States.

Americo-Liberian rule (1847–1980)

Between 1847 and 1980, the state of Liberia was dominated by the small minority of black colonists and their descendants, known collectively as [Americo-Liberians](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Americo-Liberian). The Americo-Liberian minority, many of whom were mixed African Americans, tended to marry within their group. They had established plantations and businesses, and were generally richer than the indigenous people of Liberia and exercised overwhelming political power.

**Politics**



Map of Liberia c.1856

Politically, Liberia was dominated by two political parties. The Americo-Liberians had limited the [franchise](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suffrage) to prevent indigenous Liberians from voting in elections. The Liberian (later the Republican Party), was supported primarily by mixed-race African Americans from poorer backgrounds, while the [True Whig Party](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/True_Whig_Party) received much of its following from richer blacks. From the first presidential election in 1847, the Liberian Party held political dominance. It used its position of power to attempt to cripple its opposition.

In 1869, however, the Whigs won the presidential election under [Edward James Roye](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_James_Roye). Although Roye was deposed after two years and the Republicans returned to government, the Whigs regained power in 1878. This party maintained power constantly afterward.

A series of rebellions among the indigenous Liberian population took place between the 1850s and 1920s. In 1854, a newly independent African-American state in the region, the [Republic of Maryland](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republic_of_Maryland), was forced by an insurgency of the [Grebo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grebo_(ethnic_group)) and the [Kru people](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kru_people) to join Liberia. Liberia's expansion brought the colony into border disputes with French and British colonists in [French Guinea](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_Guinea) and [Sierra Leone](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sierra_Leone), respectively. The presence and protection of the United States Navy in West Africa until 1916 prevented any military threat to Liberian territory or independence.

**Society**

**Americo-Liberian and indigenous segregation, 1847-1940**



[Charles D. B. King](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_D._B._King), 17th President of Liberia (1920-1930), with his entourage on the steps of the [Peace Palace](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peace_Palace), The Hague (the Netherlands), 1927.

The social order in Liberia was dominated by a group of Americo-Liberians. Although descended from peoples of African origin, the ancestors of Americo-Liberians had been born in the United States for generations before emigrating to Africa; they held American cultural, religious and social values, shaped by their own heritage. Like many Americans and Europeans of the period, the Americo-Liberian held beliefs in the religious superiority of [Protestant Christianity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protestantism) and the cultural power of [European civilization](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_culture) over indigenous [animism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Animism) and culture.

The Americo-Liberians created communities and social infrastructure closely based on what they knew - American society. They spoke English, built churches and houses in styles resembling those they were familiar with in the southern United States. Although they never constituted more than five percent of the population of Liberia, they controlled key resources that allowed them to dominate the local native peoples: access to the ocean, modern technical skills, literacy and higher levels of education, and valuable relationships with many United States institutions, including the American government.

Reflecting the [system of racial segregation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Segregation_in_the_United_States) in the United States, the Americo-Liberians created a cultural and racial caste system with themselves at the top and indigenous Liberians at the bottom. They believed in a form of racial equality by which meant that all residents of Liberia had the potential of to become "civilized" through conversion to Christianity and western-style education.

**Social change, 1940-1980**

During [World War II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II) thousands of indigenous Liberians migrated from the nation's rural interior to the coastal regions in search of jobs. The Liberian Government had long opposed this kind of migration, but was no longer able to restrain it. In the decades after 1945, the Liberian government received hundreds of millions of dollars of unrestricted foreign investment, which destabilized the Liberian economy. Government revenue rose enormously, but was being grossly embezzled by government officials. Growing economic disparities caused increased hostility between indigenous groups and Americo-Liberians

The social tensions led President [Tubman](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Tubman) to enfranchise the indigenous Liberians either in 1951 or 1963 (accounts differ). Tubman and his Whig Party continued to repress political opposition, and to rig elections.

**Economics**



A one Liberian Dollar banknote from 1862

The suppression of the slave trade in West Africa by American and British navies after 1808 also produced new settlers, as these two navies would resettle liberated slaves in Liberia or Sierra Leone rather than trying to return them to their homelands. In the later 19th century, Liberia had to compete economically with European colonies in Africa. The economy of Liberia was always based on the production of agricultural produce for export. In particular, Liberia's important [coffee](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coffee) industry was destroyed in the 1870s by the emergence of production in [Brazil](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brazil).

New technology available in Europe increasingly drove Liberian shipping companies out of business. Although Roye's government attempted to procure funding for a railway in 1871, the plan never materialized. The first railway was not built until 1945. From the late 19th century, European powers such as the United Kingdom and Germany invested in infrastructure in their African colonies, making them more competitive in terms of getting products to market, improving communications, etc.

The national currency, the [Liberian dollar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberian_dollar), collapsed in 1907. The country was later forced to adopt the [United States Dollar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Dollar). The Liberian government was constantly dependent on foreign loans at high rates of exchange, which endangered the country's independence.

In 1926, [Firestone](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Firestone_Tire_and_Rubber_Company), an American rubber company, started the world’s largest rubber plantation in Liberia. This industry created 25,000 jobs, and rubber quickly became the backbone of the Liberian economy; in the 1950s, rubber accounted for 40 percent of the national budget. During the 1930s Liberia signed concession agreements with Dutch, Danish, German and Polish investors in what has been described as an "open door" economic policy.

Between 1946 and 1960, exports of natural resources such as iron, timber and rubber rose strongly. In 1971, Liberia had the world's largest rubber industry, and was the third largest exporter of iron ore. Since 1948,[ship registrations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_convenience) was another important source of state revenue.

From 1962 until 1980, the U.S. donated $280 million in aid to Liberia, in exchange for which Liberia offered its land free of rent for U.S. government facilities. Throughout the 1970s the price of rubber in the world commodities market was depressed, putting pressure on Liberian state finances.

**International relations**

After 1927, the [League of Nations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/League_of_Nations) investigated accusations that the Liberian government forcibly recruited and sold indigenous people as contract labor or slaves. In its 1930 report the League admonished the Liberian government for "systematically and for years fostering and encouraging a policy of gross intimidation and suppression", "[suppressing] the native, prevent him from realizing his powers and limitations and prevent him from asserting himself in any way whatever, for the benefit of the dominant and colonizing race, although originally the same African stock as themselves." (see also [Presidency Charles King 1920–1930](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_D._B._King)). President [Charles D. B. King](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_D._B._King) hastily resigned.

Liberian rulers also built up ties with the [Soviet bloc](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_bloc) and other powers, striving for an independent position in world politics. They maintained strong bonds with the Western world allowed them to.

**Relations with the United States**

*Main article:*[*Liberia–United States relations*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberia%E2%80%93United_States_relations)

The United States had a long history of intervening in Liberia's internal affairs, repeatedly sending naval vessels to help suppress insurrections by indigenous tribes before and after independence (in 1821, 1843, 1876, 1910, and 1915). The United States had lost interest in Liberia after 1876, and the country became closely tied to British capital. Starting in 1909, the U.S. became heavily involved in the country. By 1909, Liberia faced serious external threats to its sovereignty from the British over unpaid foreign loans and annexation of its borderlands.

In 1912 the U.S. arranged a 40-year international loan of $1.7 million, against which Liberia had to agree to four Western powers (United States, Britain, France and Germany) controlling Liberian Government revenues until 1926. American administration of the border police stabilized the frontier with [Sierra Leone](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sierra_Leone) (part of the British Empire) and checked French ambitions to annex more Liberian territory. The American navy established a coaling station in Liberia.

**World War I**

*Main article:*[*Liberia in World War I*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberia_in_World_War_I)

Liberia remained neutral for most of World War I, before joining the war on the Allied side in April 1918. After its declaration of war, Liberia expelled its resident German merchants. As they constituted the country's largest investors and trading partners, Liberia suffered economically as a result.

In 1926, the Liberian government gave a concession to the American rubber company [Firestone](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_D._B._King#Firestone_Rubber_Company) to start the world’s largest rubber plantation at [Harbel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harbel), Liberia. At the same time, Firestone arranged a $5 million private loan to Liberia. In the 1930s Liberia was again virtually bankrupt. After some United States pressure, it agreed to an assistance plan from the [League of Nations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/League_of_Nations). As part of this plan, two key officials of the League were placed in positions to "advise" the Liberian government.

**World War II**



American troops in Liberia during World

*Main article:*[*Liberia in World War II*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberia_in_World_War_II)

In 1942, Liberia signed a Defense Pact with the United States. Rubber was a strategically important commodity, and Liberia assured the U.S. and its allies of all the natural rubber they needed. Also, Liberia allowed the U.S. to use its territory as a bridgehead for transports of soldiers and war supplies, to construct military bases, airports, the Freeport of Monrovia, roads to the interior, etc. Many of these personnel who passed through Liberia were African-American soldiers (who at the time were in segregated army divisions) being deployed into military service in Europe. The American military presence boosted the Liberian economy; thousands of laborers descended from the interior to the coastal region. The country’s huge iron ore deposits were made accessible to commerce.

The Defense Areas Agreement between the U.S. and Liberia entailed the US-financed construction of Roberts Field airport, the Freeport of Monrovia, and roads into the interior of Liberia. By the end of World War II, approximately 5,000 American troops had been stationed in Liberia. Arguments substantiating this notion are that World War II infrastructure developments did not positively affect social and political struggles in Liberia and that, decades after the development from World War II, Americo-Liberians disproportionately controlled and benefited from Liberia’s growing economy and increase in foreign investment.

**Cold War**



President Tolbert and U.S. President [Jimmy Carter](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jimmy_Carter) (in car, left) in Monrovia, 1978

After World War II, the U.S. pressured Liberia to resist the expansion of [Soviet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_Union) influence in Africa during the [Cold War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cold_War). Liberian president [Tubman](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Tubman) was agreeable to this policy. Between 1946 and 1960 Liberia received some $500 million in unrestricted foreign investment, mainly from the U.S. From 1962 to 1980, the U.S. donated $280 million in aid to Liberia. In the 1970s under president Tolbert, Liberia strove for a more non-aligned and independent posture, and established diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, China, Cuba and Eastern bloc countries. It also severed ties with Israel during the [Yom Kippur War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yom_Kippur_War) in 1973, but announced it supported American involvement in the [Vietnam War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnam_War).

**End of Americo-Liberian rule**

President [William R. Tolbert, Jr.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_R._Tolbert,_Jr.) pursued a policy of suppressing opposition. Dissatisfaction over governmental plans to raise the price of rice in 1979 led to protest demonstrations in the streets of Monrovia. Tolbert ordered his troops to fire on the demonstrators, and seventy people were killed. Rioting ensued throughout Liberia, finally leading to a military coup d'état in April 1980. Tolbert was killed during the coup, and several of his ministers were executed soon afterwards, marking the end of Americo-Liberian domination of the country.

Samuel Doe and the People's Redemption Council (1980–1989)

*Main article:*[*Samuel Doe*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_Doe)

After a bloody overthrow of the Americo-Liberian régime by indigenous Liberians in 1980, a 'Redemption Council' took control of Liberia. Internal unrest, opposition to the new military regime, and governmental repression steadily grew, until in 1989 Liberia sank into outright [tribal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tribalism) and civil war.

**Coup d’état; relations with U.S.**

[Samuel Kanyon Doe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_Doe) (1951–1990) was a member of the small ethnic group the [Krahn](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Krahn), a master sergeant in the Liberian army, and trained by [U.S. Army Special Forces](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/U.S._Army_Special_Forces). On April 12, 1980, Doe led a bloody *coup d'état* against president [Tolbert](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_R._Tolbert,_Jr.), in which Tolbert and twenty-six of his supporters were murdered; ten days later thirteen of Tolbert’s Cabinet members were publicly executed. Thus ended 133 years of Merico political domination over Liberia. Doe established a military regime called the [People's Redemption Council](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/People%27s_Redemption_Council) (PRC). Many people welcomed Doe's takeover as a shift favoring the majority of the population that had been excluded from power. Immediately following the coup, the PRC tolerated a relatively free press.

Doe quickly established good relations with the United States, especially after U.S. President [Ronald Reagan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ronald_Reagan) took office in 1981. Reagan increased financial aid for Liberia, from the $20 million it had been in 1979, to $75 million, and later $95 million per year. Liberia became again an important [Cold War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cold_War) ally of the U.S.. Liberia served to protect important U.S. facilities and investments in Africa, and to counter the perceived spread of Soviet influence on the continent. Doe closed the [Libyan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Libya) mission in Monrovia and even severed diplomatic relations with the [Soviet Union](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_Union). He agreed to a modification of the mutual defense pact with the U.S., which granted staging rights on 24-hour's notice at Liberia's sea- and airports for the [U.S. Rapid Deployment Forces](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Rapid_Deployment_Forces). Under Doe, Liberian ports were opened to American, Canadian, and European ships, which brought in considerable foreign investment from shipping firms and earned Liberia a reputation as a [tax haven](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tax_haven).

**Fear of counter-coup; repression**

Doe overcame seven coup attempts between 1981 and 1985. In August 1981 he had [Thomas Weh Syen](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Weh_Syen) and four other PRC members arrested and executed for allegedly conspiring against him. Then Doe’s government declared an amnesty for all political prisoners and exiles, and released sixty political prisoners. Soon there were more internal rifts in the PRC. Doe became paranoid about the possibility of a counter-coup, and his government grew increasingly corrupt and repressive, banning political opposition, shutting down newspapers and jailing reporters. He began to systematically eliminate PRC members who challenged his authority, and to place people of his own ethnic Krahn background in key positions, which intensified popular anger. Meanwhile, the economy deteriorated precipitously. Popular support for Doe's government evaporated.

**1985 presidential election**

A draft constitution providing for a multiparty republic had been issued in 1983 and was approved by referendum in 1984. After the referendum, Doe staged a [presidential election](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberia_elections,_1985) on October 15, 1985. Nine political parties sought to challenge Doe's National Democratic Party of Liberia (NDPL), but only three were allowed to take part. Prior to the election, more than fifty of Doe's opponents were murdered. Doe was ‘elected’ with 51% of the vote, but the election was heavily rigged. Foreign observers declared the elections fraudulent, and most of the elected opposition candidates refused to take their seats. U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Africa [Chester Crocker](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chester_Crocker) testified before Congress that the election was imperfect but that at least it was a step toward democracy. He further justified his support for the election results with the claim that, in any case, all African elections were known to be rigged at that time.

**Outbreak of Civil War**

*See also:*[*First Liberian Civil War*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Liberian_Civil_War)

In November 1985 [Thomas Quiwonkpa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Quiwonkpa), Doe's former second-in-command, with an estimated 500 to 600 people, failed in an attempt to seize power; all were killed. Doe was sworn in as President on January 6, 1986. Doe then initiated crackdowns against certain tribes, such as the [Gio](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gio_Tribe) (or Dan) and [Mano](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mano_people), in the north, where most of the coup plotters came from. This government's mistreatment of certain ethnic groups resulted in divisions and violence among indigenous peoples, who until then had coexisted relatively peacefully. In the late 1980s, as fiscal austerity took hold in the United States and the perceived threat of Communism declined with the waning of the Cold War, the U.S. became disenchanted with Doe's government and began cutting off critical foreign aid to Liberia. This, together with the popular opposition, made Doe’s position precarious.

First Liberian Civil War (1989–1996)

*Main article:*[*First Liberian Civil War*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Liberian_Civil_War)

In the late 1980s opposition from abroad to [Doe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_Doe)’s regime led to economic collapse. Doe had already been repressing and crushing internal opposition for some time, when in November 1985 another coup attempt against him failed. Doe retaliated against tribes such as the [Gio](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gio_Tribe) (or Dan) and [Mano](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mano_people) in the north, where most of the coup plotters had come from. Doe’s [Krahn](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Krahn) tribe began attacking other tribes, particularly in [Nimba County](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nimba_County) in the northeast of Liberia, bordering on [Côte d’Ivoire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/C%C3%B4te_d%E2%80%99Ivoire) (Ivory Coast) and on [Guinea](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guinea). Some Liberian northerners fled brutal treatment from the Liberian army into the Ivory Coast.

**Charles Taylor and the NPFL, 1980–89**

[Charles Taylor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Taylor_(Liberia)), born 1948, is son to a [Gola](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gola_people) mother and either an [Americo-Liberian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Americo-Liberian) or an [Afro-Trinidadian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afro-Trinidadian) father. Taylor was a student at Bentley College in [Waltham, Massachusetts](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waltham,_Massachusetts), U.S.A., from 1972 to 1977, earning a degree in economics. After the 1980 *coup d’état* he served some time in Doe’s government until he was sacked in 1983 on accusation of embezzling government funds. He fled Liberia, was arrested in 1984 in Massachusetts on a Liberian warrant for extradition, and jailed in Massachusetts; escaped from jail in 1985, and probably fled to [Libya](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Libya). In 1989, while in the Ivory Coast, Taylor assembled a group of rebels into the National (NPFL), mostly from the [Gio](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gio_Tribe) and [Mano](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mano_people) tribes.

**War**

December 1989, the NPFL invaded Nimba County in Liberia. Thousands of Gio and Mano joined them, Liberians of other ethnic background as well. The Liberian army (AFL) counterattacked, and retaliated against the whole population of the region. Mid-1990, a war was raging between Krahn on one side, and Gio and Mano on the other. On both sides, thousands of civilians were massacred.

By the middle of 1990, Taylor controlled much of the country, and by June laid siege to [Monrovia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monrovia). In July, [Yormie Johnson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yormie_Johnson) split off from NPFL and formed the [Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Independent_National_Patriotic_Front_of_Liberia) (INPFL), based on the Gio tribe. Both NPFL and INPFL continued siege on Monrovia.

In August 1990, the [Economic Community of West African States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economic_Community_of_West_African_States) (ECOWAS), an organization of West African states, created a military intervention force called [Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economic_Community_of_West_African_States_Monitoring_Group) (ECOMOG) of 4,000 troops, to restore order. President Doe and Yormie Johnson (INPFL) agreed to this intervention, Taylor didn’t. On September 9, President Doe paid a visit to the barely established headquarters of ECOMOG in the Free Port of Monrovia. While he was at the ECOMOG headquarters, he was attacked by INPFL, taken to the INPFL’s Caldwell base, tortured and killed.

November 1990, ECOWAS agreed with some principal Liberian players but without Charles Taylor, on an Interim Government of National Unity (IGNU) under President [Dr. Amos Sawyer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amos_Sawyer). Sawyer established his authority over most of Monrovia, with the help of a paramilitary police force, the 'Black Berets', under [Brownie Samukai](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brownie_Samukai), while the rest of the country was in the hands of the various warring factions.

June 1991, former Liberian army fighters formed rebel group [United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Liberation_Movement_of_Liberia_for_Democracy) (ULIMO), entered western Liberia in September ’91, and gained territories from the NPFL.



American troops secure Freeport of Monrovia, 2003

In 1993, ECOWAS brokered a peace agreement in [Cotonou](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cotonou), Benin. On 22 September 1993, the United Nations established the [United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Observer_Mission_in_Liberia)(UNOMIL) to support ECOMOG in implementing the Cotonou agreement. March 1994, the Interim Government of [Amos Sawyer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amos_Sawyer) was succeeded by a Council of State of six members headed by [David D. Kpormakpor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_D._Kpormakpor). Renewed armed hostilities broke out in 1994 and held on. During the course of the year, ULIMO split into two militias: ULIMO-J, a Krahn faction led by [Roosevelt Johnson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roosevelt_Johnson), and ULIMO-K, a Mandigo-based faction under [Alhaji G.V. Kromah](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alhaji_G.V._Kromah). Faction leaders agreed to the Akosombo peace agreement in Ghana but with little consequence. October 1994, the UN reduced its number of UNOMIL observers to about 90 because of the lack of will of combatants to honor peace agreements. December 1994, factions and parties signed the Accra agreement, but fighting continued. August 1995, factions signed an agreement largely brokered by [Jerry Rawlings](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jerry_Rawlings), Ghanaian President; Charles Taylor agreed. September 1995, [Kpormakpor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_D._Kpormakpor)’s *Council of State* is succeeded by one under civilian [Wilton G. S. Sankawulo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wilton_G._S._Sankawulo) and with the factional heads Charles Taylor, Alhaji Kromah and [George Boley](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Boley) in it. April 1996, followers of Taylor and Kromah assaulted the headquarters of Roosevelt Johnson in Monrovia, and the peace accord collapsed. In August 1996, a new ceasefire is reached in [Abuja](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abuja), Nigeria. September 3, 1996, [Ruth Perry](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ruth_Perry) followed [Sankawulo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wilton_G._S._Sankawulo) as chairwoman of the Council of State, with the same three militia leaders in it.

Second Liberian Civil War (1997–2003)

*Main article:*[*Second Liberian Civil War*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Liberian_Civil_War)

**Elections 1997**

[Charles Taylor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Taylor_(Liberia)) won the 1997 presidential elections with 75.33 percent of the vote, while the runner-up, [Unity Party](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unity_Party_(Liberia)) leader [Ellen Johnson Sirleaf](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ellen_Johnson_Sirleaf), received a mere 9.58 percent of the vote. Accordingly, Taylor's [National Patriotic Party](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Patriotic_Party) gained 21 of a possible 26 seats in the Senate, and 49 of a possible 64 seats in the House of Representatives. The election was judged free and fair by some observers although it was charged that Taylor had employed widespread intimidation to achieve victory at the polls.

**1997–1999**

Bloodshed in Liberia did slow considerably, but it did not end. Violence kept flaring up. During his entire reign, Taylor had to fight insurgencies against his government. Suspicions were, Taylor continued to assist rebel forces in neighbouring countries, like [Sierra Leone](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sierra_Leone), trading weapons for diamonds.

**1999–2003**

Some ULIMO forces reformed themselves as the [Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberians_United_for_Reconciliation_and_Democracy) (LURD), backed by the government of neighbouring [Guinea](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guinea). In 1999, they emerged in northern Liberia, in April 2000 they started fighting in [Lofa County](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lofa_County) in northernmost Liberia. By the spring of 2001 they were posing a major threat to the Taylor government. Liberia was now engaged in a complex three-way conflict with Sierra Leone and the Guinea Republic.

Meanwhile, the [United Nations Security Council](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Security_Council) in March 2001 ([Resolution 1343](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Security_Council_Resolution_1343)) concluded that Liberia and Charles Taylor played roles in the civil war in Sierra Leone, and therefore:

* banned all arms sales to, and diamonds sales from Liberia; and
* banned high Liberian Government members to travel to UN-states.

By the beginning of 2002, Sierra Leone and Guinea were supporting the LURD, while Taylor was supporting opposition factions in both countries. By supporting Sierra Leonean rebels, Taylor also drew the enmity of the British and Americans.

Other elements of the former ULIMO-factions formed another new small rebel group in the Republic of Ivory Coast, the [Movement for Democracy in Liberia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Movement_for_Democracy_in_Liberia) (MODEL) Headed by Mr. Yayah Nimley, in 2003 and emerged in the south of Liberia.

**Women of Liberia**

*Main article:*[*Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women_of_Liberia_Mass_Action_for_Peace)



[Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women_of_Liberia_Mass_Action_for_Peace).

In 2002, the women in Liberia were tired of seeing their country torn apart. Organized by social worker [Leymah Gbowee](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leymah_Gbowee), women started gathering and praying in a fish market to protest the violence. They organized the Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET), and issued a statement of intent: "In the past we were silent, but after being killed, raped, dehumanized, and infected with diseases, and watching our children and families destroyed, war has taught us that the future lies in saying NO to violence and YES to peace! We will not relent until peace prevails."

Joined by Liberian Muslim Women's Organization, Christian and Muslim women joined forces to create [Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women_of_Liberia_Mass_Action_for_Peace). They wore white, to symbolize peace. They staged silent [nonviolence](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nonviolence) protests and forced a meeting with President [Charles Taylor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Taylor_(Liberia)) and extracted a promise from him to attend peace talks in [Ghana](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ghana).

In 2003, a delegation of Liberian women went to [Ghana](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ghana) to continue to apply pressure on the warring factions during the peace process. They staged a [sit-in](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sit_in) outside of the Presidential Palace, blocking all the doors and windows and preventing anyone from leaving the peace talks without a resolution. [Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women_of_Liberia_Mass_Action_for_Peace) became a political force against violence and against their government. Their actions brought about an agreement during the stalled peace talks. As a result, the women were able to achieve peace in [Liberia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberia) after a 14-year civil war and later helped bring to power the country's first female head of state, [Ellen Johnson Sirleaf](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ellen_Johnson_Sirleaf).

**UN timber embargo and arrest warrant against Taylor**



The [Buduburam](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buduburam) [refugee camp](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Refugee_camp) west of [Accra](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Accra), Ghana, home in 2005 to more than 40,000 refugees from Liberia

On March 7, 2003, the war tribunal [Special Court for Sierra Leone](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special_Court_for_Sierra_Leone) (SCSL) decided to summon Charles Taylor and charge him with [war crimes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_crime) and [crimes against humanity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crimes_against_humanity), but they kept this decision and this charge secret until June that year.

Due to concerns over the lack of social, humanitarian and development use of industry revenue by the Liberian government, the UN Security Council enacted a 10-month embargo on timber imports from Liberia on July 7, 2003 (passed in Resolution 1478).

By mid-2003, LURD controlled the northern third of the country and was threatening the capital, MODEL was active in the south, and Taylor's government controlled only a third of the country: Monrovia and central Liberia.

On June 4, 2003, ECOWAS organized peace talks in [Accra](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Accra), Ghana, among the Government of Liberia, civil society, and the rebel groups LURD and MODEL. On the opening ceremony, in Taylor’s presence, the SCSL revealed their charge against Taylor which they had kept secret since March, and also issued an international arrest warrant for Taylor. The SCSL indicted Taylor for “bearing the greatest responsibility” for atrocities in Sierra Leone since November 1996. The Ghanaian authorities did not attempt to arrest Taylor, declaring they could not round up a president they themselves had invited as a guest for peace talks. The same day, Taylor returned to Liberia.

**Pressure of rebels, Presidents, and UN: Taylor resigns**

June 2003, LURD began a siege of Monrovia. July 9, the Nigerian President offered Taylor safe [exile](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exile) in his country, if Taylor stayed out of Liberian politics. Also in July, American President [Bush](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_W._Bush) stated twice that Taylor “must leave Liberia”. Taylor insisted that he would resign only if American [peacekeeping](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peacekeeping) troops were deployed to Liberia. August 1, 2003, the Security Council, ([Resolution 1497](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Security_Council_Resolution_1497)) decided on a multinational force in Liberia, to be followed-on by a United Nations stabilization force. ECOWAS sent troops under the banner of '[ECOMIL](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ECOMIL)' to Liberia. These troops started to arrive in Liberia probably as of August 15. The U.S. provided logistical support. President Taylor resigned, and flew into exile in [Nigeria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nigeria). Vice-President [Moses Blah](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moses_Blah) replaced Taylor as interim-President. A ECOWAS-ECOMIL force of 1000 Nigerian troops was airlifted into Liberia on August 15, to halt the occupation of [Monrovia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monrovia) by rebel forces. Meanwhile, U.S. stationed a [Marine Expeditionary Unit](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marine_Expeditionary_Unit) with 2300 Marines offshore Liberia.

Peace agreement and transitional government (2003–2005)



[Gyude Bryant](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gyude_Bryant)

On August 18, 2003, the Liberian Government, the rebels, political parties, and leaders from civil society signed the [Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Accra_Comprehensive_Peace_Agreement) that laid the framework for a two-year National Transitional Government of Liberia. August 21, they selected businessman [Charles Gyude Bryant](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Gyude_Bryant) as Chair of the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL), effective on October 14. These changes paved the way for the ECOWAS peacekeeping mission to expand into a 3,600-strong force, constituted by [Benin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benin), Gambia, [Ghana](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ghana), Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Nigeria, [Senegal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Senegal) and [Togo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Togo).

On October 1, 2003, [UNMIL](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UNMIL) took over the peacekeeping duties from ECOWAS. Some 3,500 West African troops were provisionally ‘re-hatted’ as United Nations peacekeepers. The UN Secretary-General commended the African Governments who have contributed to UNMIL, as well as the United States for its support to the regional force. October 14, 2003, Blah handed power to Gyude Bryant.

Fighting initially continued in parts of the country, and tensions between the factions did not immediately vanish. But fighters were being disarmed; in June 2004, a program to reintegrate the fighters into society began; the economy recovered somewhat in 2004; by year's end, the funds for the re-integration program proved inadequate; also by the end of 2004, more than 100,000 Liberian fighters had been disarmed, and the disarmament program was ended.

In light of the progress made, President Bryant requested an end to the UN embargo on Liberian diamonds (since March 2001) and timber (since May 2003), but the Security Council postponed such a move until the peace was more secure. Because of a supposed ‘fundamentally broken system of governance that contributed to 23 years of conflict in Liberia’, and failures of the Transitional Government in curbing corruption, the Liberian government and the [International Contact Group on Liberia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Contact_Group_on_Liberia) signed onto the anti-corruption program [GEMAP](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GEMAP), starting September 2005.

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf elected president (2005)

*Main articles:*[*Liberian elections, 2005*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberian_elections,_2005)*and*[*Ellen Johnson Sirleaf*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ellen_Johnson_Sirleaf)



[Ellen Johnson Sirleaf](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ellen_Johnson_Sirleaf).

The transitional government prepared for fair and peaceful democratic elections on October 11, 2005, with UNMIL troops safeguarding the peace. Twenty three candidates stood for the presidential election, with [George Weah](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Weah), internationally famous footballer, [UNICEF](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UNICEF) Goodwill Ambassador and member of the [Kru](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kru_people) ethnic group, and [Ellen Johnson Sirleaf](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ellen_Johnson_Sirleaf), a former [World Bank](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Bank) economist and finance minister, Harvard-trained economist and of mixed [Americo-Liberian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Americo-Liberian) and indigenous descent. In the first round, no candidate took the required majority, Weah won this round with 28% of the vote. A run-off between the top two vote getters, Weah and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, was necessary.

The second round of elections took place on November 8, 2005. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf won this runoff decisively. 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. Sirleaf claimed victory of this round, winning 59 per cent of the vote. However, Weah alleged electoral fraud, despite international observers declaring the election to be free and fair. Although Weah was still threatening to take his claims to the Supreme Court if no evidence of fraud was found, Johnson-Sirleaf was declared winner on November 23, 2005, and took office on January 16, 2006.

Recent events (2006–present)

**Allegations of labor rights abuses by Firestone**

In November 2005, the [International Labor Rights Fund](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Labor_Rights_Fund) filed an Alien Tort Claims Act (ATCA) case against [Bridgestone](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bridgestone), the parent company of Firestone, alleging “forced labor", the modern equivalent of slavery, on the [Firestone](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Firestone_Tire_and_Rubber_Company) Plantation in [Harbel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harbel). In May 2006, the [United Nations Mission in Liberia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Mission_in_Liberia) (UNMIL) released a report: “Human Rights in Liberia’s Rubber Plantations: Tapping into the Future” which detailed the results of its investigation into the conditions on the Firestone plantation in Liberia.

**Extradition and trial of Charles Taylor, arrest of Bryant**

Under international pressure, President [Sirleaf](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ellen_Johnson_Sirleaf) requested in March 2006 that [Nigeria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nigeria) extradite Charles Taylor, who was then brought before an international tribunal in [Sierra Leone](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sierra_Leone) to face charges of [crimes against humanity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crimes_against_humanity), arising from events during the Sierra Leone civil war (his trial was later transferred to [The Hague](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Hague) for security purposes). In June 2006, the United Nations ended its embargo on Liberian timber (effective since May 2003), but continued its diamond embargo (effective since March 2001) until an effective certificate of origin program was established, a decision that was reaffirmed in October 2006.

In March 2007, former Interim President Bryant was arrested and charged with having embezzled government funds while in office. In August 2007, the [Supreme Court of Liberia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supreme_Court_of_Liberia) allowed the criminal prosecution for this to proceed in the lower courts. The court ruled that Bryant was not entitled to immunity as the head of state under the Constitution as he was not elected to the position and he was not acting in accordance with law when he allegedly stole USD $1.3 million in property from the government.

**Ebola epidemic**

In 2014 a [Ebola virus disease](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ebola_virus_disease) epidemic struck West Africa (see [Ebola virus epidemic in West Africa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ebola_virus_epidemic_in_West_Africa)), and spread to Liberia in early 2014. A few initial cases grew into a [Ebola virus epidemic in Liberia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ebola_virus_epidemic_in_Liberia).