

A Liberian Life

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# A Liberian Life

*Memoir of an Academic and Former  
Minister of State for Presidential Affairs*

*By*

D. Elwood Dunn



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*To the loving memory of Matilda: my wife and partner for half a century  
and our four children:  
Daniel Elwood, Jr., Chandra Rachel, Germaine Sunu, and Sedar Thomas.*





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## Preface

An important purpose for writing one's life story is to personalize history in the hope that such individual accounts will contribute to the building blocks for the history of a people. I have been blessed with three careers. The first started while I was still in graduate school at the beginning of the 1970s. There was a hiatus of six years before my teaching career resumed in 1981. Cumulatively, my teaching career lasted for 35 years and was comparatively the career of longest duration. The interim period of six years was my Liberian government service, during which I participated in, and acquired important insights into governance in Liberia. The third career was stumbled upon as it came following my retirement after more than three decades in academia. I was invited to participate in a number of governance reform-related projects during the administration of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. This final chapter of my life will indeed climax with the publication of this memoir. It is my hope that readers will come to know me as they acquire some appreciation of my engagements and a glimpse into the Liberia of my generation.

## Acknowledgments

I acknowledge with thanks the contributions of many to this final product. While far many more assisted than I can mention, the following deserve to be singled out: Dr. Sakui Malakpa was the first to read my draft and offer critical comments. Thanks, Sakui, for your “succeeding generations will cherish this work and thank you for it as I do.” Dr. John Yoder was next with detailed incisive and extensive comments and commentaries on my draft. His critical remarks contributed significantly to improving my prose and adding important analytical dimensions. I owe John Yoder a debt of gratitude. Dr. Danielle Smith, a Liberian academic at Syracuse University, while offering her own comments, helped me avoid certain moral pitfalls. Dr. Brooks Mammon’s comments helped bring clarity to certain issues. I found illuminating some of the comments of anonymous peer reviewers and I thank them as well. Finally came my old Cuttington College professor, Dr. John Gay. Amidst the vagaries of old age, he eagerly took on perhaps this last favor for me. Constantly apologizing for delays in returning to me with his comments, he persevered. Accompanying his comments were these encouraging words: “I am impressed with your ability to summarize so much of the important history of Liberia during your lifetime and during your unwavering commitment to making Liberia a better country. I relived much Liberian and personal history as I read your book. I felt present, not just as an observer but also as a participant who shared in and, in a few cases, even helped to make that history. I was pleased and privileged to have provided an occasional nudge as you forged your life and your commitment to your native land. May Liberia have more sons and daughters like you as it goes forward.”

Given the personal nature of the memoir genre, I must underscore that I am alone responsible for what may pass as both the positives and the shortcomings of this book.

*D. Elwood Dunn*

Silver Spring, Maryland, USA

August, 2021

## Introduction

I envisaged a life trajectory of unpretending service to church and country as my alma mater, Cuttington College, enjoined us almost 60 years ago. In that scenario I saw my role, perhaps as a career diplomat not sufficiently consequential to warrant a personal memoir. Whatever service record I established would speak for itself, or so I thought.

The bloody coup d'état of April 1980 compelled a recalibration, though I was in government service for only six years. I was advancing fast enough – some say I was a “rising star,” – that I faced the prospect of being eliminated along with other senior government officials who perished in the coup. But I miraculously survived the overthrow, even though for the six months prior I had been Minister of State for Presidential Affairs and Chief of Staff to President Tolbert. Before being named to the Cabinet, I had served as Deputy Minister of State for two-and-a-half years. And before then I served at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as an Assistant Minister for three years. All of the six years serving in government, but especially the years at the Executive Mansion, exposed me to some of the seminal events that eventuated in the coup. Few experienced what I did and lived to tell the story. I feel an obligation to tell that story – admittedly from my vantage point – for the benefit of those who would write the history of that era. This is the first motive for undertaking the project.

What did I do with my life following my six years of government service? Constrained by circumstances to self-exile in December 1980, following on six months teaching at the University of Liberia, I sought and found a teaching position in the United States at Sewanee: The University of the South, in Tennessee. I would spend the next 31 years of my life molding myself into a good teacher in a liberal arts college, and as a researcher of the African experience with emphasis on Liberia. Strong on the nexus between teaching and research, Sewanee enabled me to advance my life-long desire to better understand my country. Highlighting the accomplishments of that effort constitutes a second motive or reason for undertaking the writing of a memoir.

Perhaps a third reason for a memoir from me stems from an invitation I received in 2012 from President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to deliver the traditional national oration on July 26, 2012, on the occasion of the 165<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the independence of Liberia. The oration – a distillation of my candid perspective on Liberia's past, present and future prospects – was followed by a number of consultancy projects with the government. The projects included

leading an independent investigation into alleged improprieties in the Sirleaf government, service as a team member on the long-term perspective study on Liberia dubbed “Vision 2030,” membership in a national Constitution Review Committee, project coordinator for a national symbols review, and membership in a team coordinating the writing of a comprehensive history of Liberia. These projects were for me opportunities to bring to bear what I had gleaned from my years of research and study for what I hoped was the government’s reform agenda. I thus entered upon these engagements with utmost enthusiasm.

My rationale for writing a memoir is thus threefold: my vantage point from six years of government service, what 31 unbroken years of teaching and research have taught me, and a window on contemporary Liberia acquired from almost a subsequent decade of government consultancy. My memoir attempts to weave these three sets of experiences into my life’s journey – one Liberian’s life – from the extraordinary warmth and nurture of my maternal grandparents in Lower Buchanan, Grand Bassa County, into the wider world fraught as much with challenges as with opportunities. It is my hope that my life’s experience will serve to inspire and motivate young Liberians and others to prepare themselves for self-fulfillment through a life of service to others.

## Early Years

### *My Ancestors*

My formative years began with my maternal parents: my mother, her parents, and their lineages. I developed a deep and abiding attachment to my maternal grandparents. My father's entry into my life came later, was intermittent, and, at times, disruptive. It was only in later life that I came to know my paternal ancestry.

Though a cliché, I was born to humble circumstances, on January 28, 1942, in a modest immigrant-style frame house, home of my maternal grandparents, in Lower Buchanan, Grand Bassa County, Liberia. Before 1841, the city of Buchanan (lower, central, and upper) was known as Bassa Cove, even Port Cresson for a part of the area. The name Buchanan was to honor the white American colonial administrator, Thomas Buchanan (1808–1841), who was appointed by American colonization societies as leader of Bassa Cove and subsequently as the first governor of the amalgamated colonial settlements known as the Commonwealth of Liberia (1839–1841).

My mother, Mayetta Teresa Mason, was born with her twin sister (Maryann Palmetta Mason-Ledlow) on May 27, 1917. The two sisters were educated together at the Roman Catholic St. Peter Claver's Teachers Training Institute in Lower Buchanan. They completed together in 1936 the course of study and were duly certificated. For years growing up, I saw their diplomas prominently displayed in our living room. Their interesting class song of 1936 went like this:

Boys of Spirit, Boys of Will,  
Boys of Muscles, Brain and Power;  
Fit to cope with anything,  
These are wanted every hour,  
Chorus: Boys Wanted!  
These are wanted every hour.

Girls of Spirit, Girls of will,  
Girls of Beauty, Fair and Kind;  
Fit to cope with anything,  
These are wanted every hour.  
Chorus: Girls Wanted!  
These are wanted every hour.

Though twins, the two sisters were dissimilar in temperament. A story that makes the point is about a nursing-mother acquaintance who visited their home. When she noticed that her breast milk was soaking her clothing, someone thought the baby twins could help the situation. My aunt went first, but she simply refused the stranger. My mother was next. She looked around, closed her eyes, and went all out for the breast of a stranger.

My mother had just ended a short-lived marriage and may have been contemplating her next move when, I am told, she encountered my father who was Superintendent of Grand Bassa County. Relatives who lived in the home, where I was both conceived and born, told me the details. My grandparents felt their home violated and themselves disrespected by a powerful superintendent-father. But they were quick to forgive their daughter as they accepted the *fait accompli* of her pregnancy. Soon my deeply religious grandmother had a dream, which foretold that I would be a boy, and she pre-named me after the biblical Daniel.

After having me, and my younger sister Doris (Mason-Elliott), my mother was off to Monrovia to make a life for herself. There, she subsequently remarried and had two other children, my younger sisters Lucelia and Euphemia. In Monrovia, mother clerked at a number of government agencies, including the Agriculture Department. The Board of Foreign Concessions was probably her last place of work as a clerk. She would have a troubled life in her latter years, struggling with mental illness. She died in Harbel on September 19, 1990, at age 73, a casualty of Charles Taylor's insurgency, about which more will be forthcoming, that morphed into the devastating Liberian civil war,

My sister Doris was a teacher at the Firestone high school in Harbel, and Mother, whom I joined cousins in calling "Aunt Tarr," lived with my sister, Doris. My one and only visit with them was in 1988. As the war and accompanying rumors continued, Doris made a trip to Monrovia to buy mother's medication. While in Monrovia, National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) forces entered the Firestone area, which led to the separation of mother from daughter. She had left mother in the care of some teenagers, who lived with them, but there was absolutely no communication between them. Days turned to weeks, weeks to months, many months as the NPFL forces battled government forces with the civilian population caught in the crossfires and at the mercy of the combatants.

Doris's other ordeal in Monrovia happened as follows. After several months on the move with crowds of "internally displaced persons" on the orders of NPFL commandos, she found herself on a Sunday morning in a house with many others. She stumbled on a mirror. The image of her emaciated self that she saw frightened her and led her to scream so hard that the whole house

was alarmed. She survived, eventually managing to travel to Buchanan, still not knowing Mother's fate. As Doris narrated to me, the day following her arrival in Buchanan, she and a cousin went walking down a familiar street, and suddenly two young men emerged from a small house to greet them. She recognized the young men as neighbors' children in Harbel. One of them, while greeting her, extended condolences. "Did she die?" Doris inquired, fearing the response and bursting into tears. His response was "Ma, the old lady could not stand the many things that were happening." This is how we first learned that our mother had gone home to her eternal rest.

In mid 1991, I received a letter addressed to sister Lucelia and me. It began: "I am Oretha Reeves Peal, a friend of your sister Doris. I am also the nurse in charge of the Firestone Medical Center and was there and had your mother admitted and cared for while your sister was separated from her during the civil war. I am sorry to say that we lost your mother, but we were lucky to have had a coffin and a nice dress. We got a minister to say a few words over her and a few of us attended the burial. A male friend of Doris' fixed her grave. So if you ever return to Liberia you will be fortunate to see your mother's grave. Your mother was a good Christian and she died as one ..." I had a subsequent phone conversation with Ms. Peal in August 1991, where I had the opportunity to express to her directly our gratitude for her extraordinary love displayed in the heat of battle. We have stayed in touch in the ensuing years.

Meanwhile, as the long war subsided, Doris had this *In Memoriam* with Mother's photograph published in a local daily: "The Late Mother Mayetta Mason. Mother, September 19, 1990 you ended your life at the Duside Hospital. You walked that valley not alone, but you were guided by our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Mother, you have laid down your garment of illness to put on the vestment of eternal rest. Your home going still burns our hearts. But our only consolation is, we will meet you one bright morning on that beautiful shore. Your four children: Elwood, Doris, Lucelia and Euphemia say rest in your Savior's arms until we meet again. From Doris Elliott for the Family." As I elaborated elsewhere in this account, I was blessed to visit my mother's grave and construct a concrete façade, on which was mounted a plaque with her vital information: May 27, 1917 – September 19, 1990.

Though it is my grandmother that I think of as Mother, I have some good memories of my biological mother. I remember being with her as a toddler at the Episcopal St. John's Parish Day School, where she may have taught for a while in the 1940s. When residing in Monrovia, she made periodic trips home to visit us, and she regularly sent us clothing and other goodies.

Somehow, I found myself in Monrovia in 1952 during President William V.S. Tubman's second inauguration. Tubman was Liberia's longest-serving

president, and was in office from 1944 until his death in 1971. Mother was then married to Wilmot Flood (an expert ivory craftsman who made walking canes for former President C.D.B. King), with whom she had my two younger sisters, Lucelia Flood-Partridge and Euphemia Flood-Cummings. I stayed on, attending briefly St. Patrick's Catholic school, then located on upper Ashmun Street. Fast-forwarding to my student days at the University of Liberia and subsequently at Cuttington, I have fond memories visiting with my mother and enjoying her delicious Liberian dishes, even bringing along with me a Cuttington schoolmate named Edward W. Neufville II, later Diocesan Bishop of the Episcopal Church of Liberia. There was irregular correspondence during my years of study abroad (1965–1974) and again from 1981 through to her death in 1990, though our correspondence at this time was more regular. I still have a number of her hand-written letters to me, especially those in which she shared with me information about her parental ancestry.

My sister Doris described our mother in a 2006 poem, which portrays her vividly and captures my memory of our mother:

*My Mother*

I view you through your signature  
 You surely come alive  
 I watch you dust the furniture  
 Each morning just at five.

Your lengthy hair wears a silky band  
 That always looks so fancy  
 “This scarf keeps in place each strand,”  
 You always told Miss Pansy

You wear neatly the white attire  
 That sparkles without wrinkles  
 Then swiftly move to light the fire  
 Which brightly glows and twinkles.

The savory meals of your own style  
 Did make me crave with hunger  
 But after feasting for a while  
 The aroma would still linger.

Your footsteps up the stairs I hear  
 Release me of much tension



Your loving smiles are always dear  
Each time my name you mention.

Attribute of you I now perceive  
The pictures that do flourish  
Are from the turns and curves received  
Your signature I cherish.

My early memories are of being nurtured in a warm, loving, and caring home by my grandmother and her carpenter husband, my grandfather. Because my mother was not one to tarry long once I had passed the toddler stage, she left me with her parents and moved to Monrovia to make a life for herself. As a result, my grandparents became my parents, nurturing me physically, morally, and spiritually. Life was centered on home, school, and church. At home we played, did chores, and prayed to a God my grandparents revered absolutely. It was perhaps in my early teen years that I began imitating preachers. I would build a pulpit from boxes and chairs, dress in my grandmother's long white sweater in imitation of the Catholic priests at school, assemble my cousins and other children in the home in front of my pulpit, and begin to preach like the local Baptist Rev. Levi H. Martin: "Prepare me a body that I may go down to redeem my people." The adults around told my grandparents they should not discourage me as what I was doing might well be a sign of things to come. School was integral to our life, as was going to church on Sundays and holding family prayers. My grandparents were my all-in-all for the duration of my childhood.

One of the hallmarks of the culture of my youth was a certain blending of things traditionally African with habits of repatriate communities or Black immigrants from the new world. Such was the case with the development of speech (Liberian English), foods, medicine, and even religion (notion of syncretism). I recall my grandfather overseeing my circumcision possibly at four or five years of age. Grandfather got me out of bed very early one morning and led me to the back of our house. There I heard knives being sharpened on a rock. The traditional herbalist that had been summoned from our near interior, along with his aides, performed the circumcision as Grandfather held me. With no numbing medication I was circumcised, while I screamed at the top of my little lungs. But I knew at the end of the ordeal that Grandfather dearly loved his little grandson, who had to undergo this rite of passage. Herbs were applied to the wound and healing came in due course.

As they were themselves parents to four children, whom they sent to the available schools and nurtured in the Christian faith through the Bethel

African Methodist Episcopal Church of Lower Buchanan, I (and some of my cousins) would be the beneficiary of similar opportunities. But, what manner of people were these grandparents of mine? Who was Mary Ann Kilby Mason, my grandmother, and who was Thomas Alfred Mason, my grandfather?

Mary A. Mason was born in Barchue Town, Grand Bassa County, on March 20, 1888. Her father was James Kilby, descendant of Randal Kilby who immigrated in 1854 to Liberia from Virginia, USA. Her mother was Kon-Yohn Barchue of Barchue Town, Grand Bassa County. James went inland to trade from his homebase, in what today is probably No. 3A Barchue Town. The exchange of goods between rural and urban communities was an important feature of Liberian life, even as I observed it in my youth. That James Kilby would avail himself of such opportunities to acquire harvested piassava, palm kernels, and palm oil and other such produce comes as no surprise. Kilby met Kon-Yohn fresh from the traditional Sande School. He eventually married her in the traditional fashion. Three children issued from the union: Samuel A. Kilby, Mary A. Kilby, and Stella Kilby. Kon-Yohn died when Mary was age 17, and her brother Samuel placed her as a ward in the care of his friends, expatriates from Freetown, Sierra Leone, Daniel Pratt Mason and his wife Kaziah Mason. When the Masons decided to return to Freetown, they took Mary with them. There, these friends of her brother's raised her, and, there, she met her future husband, Thomas A. Mason (son of Daniel Pratt Mason). They lived in the same home. Mary was, apparently, in the fashion of that time, trained for motherhood, learning the rudiments of good housekeeping and children rearing, undergirded by a strong Christian faith and way of life. But they did not send her to school long enough, so her education was limited to her ability to read the Bible and explain its precepts. She did this so well that, when I did my first systematic reading of the Bible in college, I could recall vividly the biblical characters my grandmother had instilled in us as children.

Mary met her husband, Thomas A. Mason, son of Daniel Pratt Mason in Freetown. They would together return to Liberia to start their long married life. Grandmother returned home with a strong Sierra Leone accent, which she later lost. Grandfather never lost his Sierra Leone accent, often slipping into Krio as he spoke to us. Grandmother died at age 89 on October 29, 1977. I was blessed to have seen her often for the last three years of her life, having returned home from graduate school in 1974. During my years away from Grandmother, especially the almost nine years abroad, we would correspond on occasions. She would dictate what she wanted said to one of my sisters or cousins still living with her. Invariably, she included something biblical or a Christian song. I found among my papers "No one ever cares for me like Jesus," a verse of which went like this:

I would love to tell you what I think of Jesus,  
 Since I found in him a Friend so strong and true;  
 I would tell you how he changed my life completely,  
 He did something that no other friend could do.

Thomas A. Mason, my grandfather was born on June 20, 1880, in New Cess, Grand Bassa County. His father was Daniel Pratt Mason and his mother, Mar-sa-Neh of New Cess. Theirs was a traditional union that was never formalized. This meant that he hardly felt the influence of his biological mother. Thomas was therefore raised by his father and his stepmother Kaziah Tete Mason (known by many as “Ma Mason”). At age 15, Thomas was taken to Freetown for training in carpentry. Fifteen years later, he returned to Liberia with his bride, Mary, whom he married in Freetown in 1910. The Dutch trading company (Oat Africaan Compaigne – OAC) employed him in short order. His skills in boat building were soon amply demonstrated as he set to work in Grand Bassa County, making trips to Sinoe County, and constructing the boats used as primary means of transportation along the Liberian coast at the time.

Thomas and his wife Mary had four children: James E.A. Mason (1912–1961), Miranda E. Mason-Bernard (1915–1994), Mayetta T. Mason (1917–1990), and Maryann P. Mason-Ledlow (1917–1987). Uncle James changed the spelling of his surname to “Mayson,” and this explains the different spellings within the family. Grandfather had a full and rewarding life, raising his four children, one of whom (James) predeceased him in 1961. Grandfather died on August 4, 1976, at age 96. I was on a government mission in Switzerland en route to Sri Lanka when I received word of his death. I felt blessed that I had visited with him on his deathbed before leaving home. I entered my grandfather’s room and went to hold his hand and asked him whether he recognized me. His feeble response, which still lingers in my ears, was, “Elwood, I know you!”

Growing up in that home of the Masons was a veritable character-molding experience. I was not alone, for some of my cousins and later siblings lived there as well. We lived in a frame house partly built by my carpenter grandfather. In those days in the 1940s and the years thereafter there was no electricity, no running water, and we used an outdoor latrine and fetched water from nearby natural running springs. With almost nothing to compare our situation to, we thought we were the luckiest, as we felt we lacked nothing of the essentials of life. All our modest material needs were met. Our grandparents were deeply religious, and so we were early brought into the fold of the Bethel AME Church, where I was baptized or christened (made Christ’s own) as an infant. Family prayers at home, church, and Sunday school were regular fare. I would even later go to the “mourners’ bench” at Thankful Baptist Church in Lower

Buchanan and “get religion.” I remember my grandmother exclaiming “Thank you Jesus for saving my child,” as I arrived home shouting one evening, after actually running several miles away from the church and towards home.

We were taught to be respectful to those older than us, especially the elderly. In our immediate surroundings were traditional huts and villages, such as a Gio town and a Kru town, whose children we played and naturally mingled with. Perhaps this is how I learned the Bassa language (which I would later lose). We had no knowledge or appreciation of cleavages in Liberian society. That would come in adulthood. We didn’t even know of the partial indigenous Bassa parentage of both Grandpa and Grandma. That too would come in our adulthood. But both grandparents spoke fluent Bassa throughout their lives.

My grandparents had a farm in a near interior area. The herbalists, who circumcised me, may have come from a neighboring village. I recall visits to our home by a Dawo Zorkeh and conversations especially with Grandmother. I wondered what it was that so engaged them as they sat talking for hours.

All of our nurturing neighbors were considered extended parents. We revered and respected, even feared them, especially when we contemplated mischief. For invariably a report on us from one of the neighbors brought swift punishment. It was a neighborhood of caring adults, some relatives, and some friends. The neighbors included Ma Etta Thomas, Droh, and Neeh Wedeh. Miraculously, I saw Neeh Wedeh on a visit to Liberia in 2013 and at the spot in Lower Buchanan, where we grew up. As I greeted her, she embraced me sobbing, as she told me that her husband, Droh had died. “Droh na mehn ooooo,” (Droh is no more) she sobbed in Bassa, on my shoulder. Neeh Wedeh has, since then also passed away. I have a photograph of the two of us, which is displayed in this book.

There was Grandma Alabama, Miss Annette and Captain Gibson, Grandma Miranda, Yakpeh and Miss Liza, and Pastor Goffagar. I must have been about six years old when Goffagar died and I have a vivid memory of his funeral. As pastor of an ethnic Bassa church, he was also an important figure in the community. I saw the county superintendent pass through our yard on his way to the funeral. There was one thing about the funeral that stuck in my mind. As the procession left the church with the traditional Liberian band music and the coffin on the heads of several men, we saw the men with the coffin break away from the procession and run in an apparent uncontrollable direction. Many appeared puzzled, including us children. The band music soon stopped, and the choir began singing in the Bassa language the song “We shall eat at the welcome table some day!” Suddenly, the men with the coffin began dancing their way back into the procession, and, as they arrived at the grave, the coffin on their heads appeared to make a bow, suggesting that the deceased was now ready to go to his eternal home. Our elders told us that the dead had the power

to influence certain things in the land of the living, and the incident at the funeral was a demonstration of the displeasure of the deceased with the band music, preferring the inspirational song rendered by the choir.

Others of our near neighbors were Miss Mariah Martin, Trucker Yonsuah, Grandma Crawford, and Joseph and Rachel Barchue (apparently related to us, but we did not then know). And within walking distance were Big Aunty (Stella Kilby-Harris) and her clan of Kilby offspring. As children, we were influenced by all of these wonderful people as they were in a real sense an extension of the values we were receiving in the home of my grandparents: family values of faith, character building through hard work, commitment to education, and integrity (your word as your bond). Our home-mates over time included Cousin Janet Barnard-Sharpe (oldest first cousin), Cousins Ethel Ledlow-Williams, and Angeline Ledlow-Taryor (and their parents, Maryann Mason-Ledlow and Philip F. Ledlow), sister Doris Mason-Elliott, and, later, Margaret Whitfield-Walker, David Alexander Mayson, and Sarah Mason-Buckner.

“Grandmother’s Love,” a poem also written by my younger sister Doris in 2006 captures well our common and collective sentiments:

When I was ill and on my bed,  
Who gazed upon my fragile face  
And nurtured me to health again?  
Grandmother

Who taught me from the Holy Book  
The Creator’s love and I should pray  
And walk his way with diligence?  
Grandmother

Who endeavored greatly that I learn  
And accomplish all within my reach  
So Independently to stand?  
Grandmother

When life challenges threatened me  
Who came along to comfort me  
Who prayed and said “Child let it be?”  
Grandmother

And now today that you are absent  
Oh how I long for your presence

Let's hope some day we'll meet again.  
Grandmother

My recollection of my relationship with my father is checkered but largely not a happy one. My first visits to what looked to me like his palatial house in Lower Buchanan occurred in the late 1940s. I remember physical and emotional coldness, at least compared to the warmth of my home with grandparents. I do not recall going to actually live with my father until about 1949, and under circumstances that were not pleasant. The stay was erratic, involving runaway episodes. Permanency came in the early 1950s, as I then remained through high school graduation in 1960. Who was my father?

Edward Lysander Dunn was a descendant of repatriates from the New World. His forebears were John (age 50) and Susan (age 20) Dunn, who came from Virginia (USA) on the vessel *Luna*, and arrived in the Liberia colony in 1836 and settled in the St. John River City area of Grand Bassa County. They had a son, Wesley Dunn, who was an only child. Wesley first married Mary Johnson, with whom he had 6 children: Wesley, Jr.; Joseph; Charley; James; Urias; and Louise. Wesley, Sr., subsequently married Caroline Wayne, and out of this union came Edward L., John, and Rachel. (I note the light complexions of John and Rachel compared to Edward L.). My father was born in Hartford, St. John River City, Grand Bassa County, Liberia, on August 13, 1902. His mother was Caroline T. Wayne Dunn and his father was Wesley S. Dunn, though complex family history also has John T. Barnard listed as his father. Of this complexity, my father himself wrote in a 1940 letter to President Edwin Barclay: "I bear the name Dunn, but my father is one J.T. Barnard who is living [Died 1952]; and although the late Old Man Dunn [Wesley Dunn] had 10 sons, and Mr. Barnard 7, yet I am the only one of the two men's children, both of whom recognize me as their son, who has ever advanced so far politically." He was alluding to the fact that he was county superintendent and later a member of the House of Representatives. The Dunn brothers were James; Wesley, Jr.; Urias; Charlie; Amos; Joseph; John; and Edward. The sisters were Louise Dunn-Reeves and Rachel Augusta Dunn-Batten. "But my father is one J.T. Barnard" (1878–1952). J.T. Barnard was a descendant of James Barnard, who emigrated from Georgia in the US in 1851 and settled in Edina, Grand Bassa County, where JT was born. The Barnard brothers were Hilary, Johnny, Edward L., Joseph, Cephas, Lewis, and Anthony. The sisters were Louise, Laura, Keturah, and Maron.

Edward L. Dunn's primary education was at the St. John's Parish Day School in Lower Buchanan and the Episcopal Mission School in Tobacconee, Grand Bassa County. The early death of his Dunn parents, who raised him,

resulted in his being sent to Freetown, the British colony of Sierra Leone, to a Methodist Boys School, where he received the rest of his formal education. Wesley Dunn died in 1910 when my father was 8 years old. This left his mother with five remaining children to care for, a situation he describes as leaving “a poor widow who had to do laundering to support herself and children until she also passed away in 1918.” It was following his mother’s death that, through the instrumentality of someone, he found his way to Freetown for school. Four years later, he returned to Liberia but settled in Monrovia, where he began a public career. He first worked briefly as a clerk to Monrovia City Mayor Gabriel Moore Johnson (son of President H.R.W. Johnson), and thereafter for 13 years he was chief clerk at the Justice Department under Attorney General Louis Arthur Grimes. In 1936, President Edwin Barclay, in keeping with his “Back-To-Your-Counties-Programme,” appointed him superintendent of Grand Bassa County in succession to Superintendent J.H. Ennis. He would serve in that position for eleven non-consecutive years.

My father was elected a member of the House of Representatives from Grand Bassa County in 1943, where he served notably with Richard A. Henries (1943–1980), William R. Tolbert, Jr. (1943–1951), and J. Carney Johnson (1943–1958). In early 1946, he spoke with President Tubman and subsequently wrote him to say that he was prepared to resign his House seat if Tubman would appoint him to his old job as superintendent of Bassa County. The actual proposed arrangement, which Tubman accepted, was that Superintendent Thomas H. Greaves would somehow be given Dunn’s House seat, as Dunn returned to become superintendent once again. Tubman obliged and Dunn returned to Bassa as superintendent in 1946. My father’s reason for returning was that he found the legislature a place of inertia and inaction, and he wanted to return to a place of action in Bassa County. I may have heard his colleague Richard Henries say that when my father came up with the idea for a speech, Henries (though not yet speaker) and other colleagues pointed him to the podium so he could say his piece. Henries was, however, insinuating that my father’s independent-minded spirit might well truncate a political career under the new Tubman administration. Subsequent events would bear this out, as my father was removed as superintendent after serving two years, and his subsequent quest for a Senate seat was never achieved.

In fact, in the speech delivered in the House of Representatives in 1946 during which he set forth why he was ill at ease in the House and preferred to return to Bassa County, my father began by addressing Mr. Speaker and Gentlemen as follows: “I am no college graduate; I am not ripe in experience ... but I have enough common sense to realize that it is high time that we, the representatives of the people, should get together and study some plan for the



welfare of the people ...” He continued: “We meet in this hall every year, make big speeches and only do what we are told to do, because we take no initiative, have no suggestions to make, no plans to bring forward, and when Executive measures arise, which are most invariably submitted after we shall have been in session for a couple of months, we rush them through simply because we are then anxious to get back to our respective homes, and at our other avocations.”

Though Tubman removed my father from office in 1948, replacing him with the Rev. Levi H. Martin, my father remained active in True Whig Party politics, attempting twice to run for the Senate (once after the death in 1949 of Senator Walter Brumskine of Upper Buchanan, the second time after the death in 1959 of Senator Edwin A. Morgan of Lower Buchanan). Although unsuccessful, he continued to enjoy the spoils of the party’s patronage system. His last public position was as a member of the National Board of Foreign Concessions under the chairmanship of Counselor Momolu Cooper. In his latter years, he was a gentleman farmer and a property owner, managing houses each in Monrovia and Lower Buchanan. He died in Lower Buchanan in 1984 at age 82.

There are a number of stories that illustrate the personal side of my father. These stories show him to have been a self-confident, assertive, demanding, and controlling individual. When serving as a Lieutenant in the militia in Monrovia in 1927, he was shot in the stomach by a disgruntled newly arrived repatriate, John Hall, alias “Sweet Candy.” Hall was a private businessman with an independent spirit far removed from politics. He sold his goods at a stall on Water Street in Monrovia. There was compulsory military service for all able-bodied men ages 16 through 50. Here is my father’s account of what transpired: “When ‘Monrovia Regulars’ (a company of the militia) first reported for duty on the 12<sup>th</sup> day of May 1927, and when the soldiers of the First Regiment were returning from the second quarterly Parade at Caldwell, St. Paul River, on that day, the 18<sup>th</sup> of May 1927, Lieut. Dunn was shot that evening through the stomach by one John Hall, commonly known as ‘Sweet Candy’ because he, the Lieut. was trying to defend the soldiers whom the said John Hall was threatening to shoot. The ‘Sweet Candy’ episode is well known by many persons living today [July 1955]. It was during the time Lieut. Dunn was confined to bed as results of the wound he received from the bullets of John Hall, that he received his first military commission as second lieutenant from the hands of the late Secretary of War, James W. Cooper.” Research revealed a more detailed account: As these militia men returned to Monrovia from quarterly parades in the upriver settlements, some had the habit of rowdiness and vandalism, destroying the booths and tables of street vendors. Hall’s stall was twice attacked with no redress from the authorities. He threatened to take the law into his own hands. Which he soon did, as on a fateful evening as the rowdy soldiers returned from parade,



they proceeded to attack the market stalls. As they reached Hall's, he opened fire and one soldier fell dead as the others fled. A brave young officer, Edward L. Dunn, approached Hall and inquired: "Sweet Candy, why did you kill this man?" The reply was a bullet in Dunn's abdomen, which created an even greater stampede, as people ran helter skelter. The available doctor in town administered a dose of castor oil, suggesting that if he survived the night, he would be fine. My father did, of course, but walked leaning on the left side where the bullet entered, for the rest of his life. Hall barricaded himself in a building and fought the forces of public order, until he perished in the building set ablaze by the authorities. My father continued to serve in the militia until 1936, when he was appointed superintendent of Grand Bassa County.

The second story sheds light on the political side of his personality. In 1940, when still serving as superintendent he received a letter from President Edwin Barclay whose term of office was coming to an end. In the letter, the president expressed concern that Superintendent Dunn was already contemplating the post-Barclay presidency, as he was reported to have said in the hearing of a political informant that the "setting sun has no scorching rays," meaning that Barclay's was already a lame duck administration. The president wrote to the superintendent: "I am asking you to look at the clock and send me immediately some explanation on this matter or else we will have to find out whether or not the sun not only scorches but burns to ashes during that hour." My father had some explaining to do, which he apparently did satisfactorily as he remained in office until 1943, when he became a member of the House of Representatives for Grand Bassa County.

I lived with my father probably beginning in 1949. My stepmother then was Annie Ethel Harmon-Dunn (1912–1986). There was a hiatus before my new stepmother became, in the early 1950s, Martha Harris Sisusa-Dunn (1906–1990). I was too young to remember the impact of Annie Harmon on my life. For Martha Sisusa, who was a veteran kindergarten schoolteacher and a staunch Seventh Day Adventist, the influence was positive, even as she struggled to remain married to my father. I found my father to be distant and rigid, never a child-focused father, though there were occasional gestures of affection, as when he bought me a bicycle and later allowed me to use his car during our high school graduation party. Four episodes illustrate my father's parenting style. The first was when he ordered me to dust off a desk and chairs in his home office. When he inspected my work, he found that I had not done a good job. As he approached me threateningly, I attempted to flee. He caught me and slapped me so hard that perhaps more out of fear I wet my pants. The incident solidified my fear of him.

The second episode occurred in 1957 during my freshman year in high school. Again, it involved domestic chores. I had not seen and therefore failed to clean spilled oil on a room floor. My father told me that he wanted the floor cleaned, implying even if it meant my skipping school. I started the cleaning but soon discovered that I could not complete it in time for school. I searched for him to say that I was going to be late for school but found he had left the house. I therefore wrote him a note, which I placed where he would not miss seeing it. In a state of mind mingled with both fear and anger, I wrote: "I am not depending on your wealth to take me through life. I am depending on my education, and I am gone to get my education." My father did not speak to me for almost a week. Though still fearful and angry, I decided to relent after a while and apologize to him. He expressed shock to me that I would write such a note but showed forgiveness, even though he then placed my note among his "Last Will and Testament" papers. It was many years later, while residing in the US, that my father died in 1984. I consequently have no idea of his last wishes or his reason for keeping my note of 1957.

There was a third episode during my time living with my father, when I was in the seventh grade. Because I was unhappy living with my father in my early teens, I was engaged in a few run-away sagas, when I surreptitiously took my small trunk and simply walked back to the only home I knew and longed for, the house of my grandparents. The time I remember most was when my father decided to take my grandparents to court to compel me to live with him. My grandmother showed up with me at the courthouse in Upper Buchanan. The visiting circuit court judge, Rodney Lewis (father of subsequent Chief Justice Johnny Lewis), told me that according to the law I was compelled to live with my father until I turned 21. Oh, what agony that brought! I was back in my father's clutches. I was very unhappy, but I began to learn a lesson in endurance. High school graduation later liberated me.

A final episode in my life with my father had to do with how I lost my ability to speak the Bassa language, which I had learned in the neighborhood where I grew up with my grandparents. My stepmother, whom I called Ma Martha, often called on me to interpret for her when a Bassa-speaking person visited her. My father walked in on one of these sessions, yelled at me, and told me that he wanted never again to see me so engaged. I, of course, complied out of sheer fear. Many years later when I found myself in school in France, I went to visit the Liberian Ambassador in Paris. As I left the Ambassador's residence, his cook, a Bassa-Liberian who knew my father by reputation, spoke to me in Bassa while escorting me to the gate. Though I understood what he said, I found myself answering him in French. I had lost my ability to speak Bassa.

I came to be an Episcopalian through my father's influence. He had been active at Trinity Episcopal Church in Monrovia (before it became a cathedral) when he resided in that city. When living in Lower Buchanan, he was active in St. John's Episcopal Church. This is why I was confirmed by Bishop B.W. Harris at St. John's in 1954 and began my life-long journey as an Episcopalian. Somehow my grandmother enters the picture here, as I have vivid recollection of her sending for the Rev. Nathaniel Jethro Jackson, rector of St. John's, as my confirmation was pending. It was a bright sunny day and I can picture Rev. Jackson dressed in his clericals, having walked the several miles from his rectory, ascending the stairs of my grandparents' home in response to the call. I don't recall what they talked about, but I am certain she wanted assurances that her grandchild would remain on the right path in his Christian sojourn. I was active as an acolyte and with Sunday school during the rectorships of the Rev. Jackson and the Rev. Lazarus Cheke Okeke. Upon graduating high school, I would simply take my role as an acolyte and activity with Sunday school and other youth activities to Trinity Cathedral, where the following clergy were in charge: the Rev. Seth C. Edwards, the Rev. Maxwell Zoon (who later renounced his clerical charge and became a Jehovah's Witness), and the Rev. Canon Burgess Carr. All of these wonderful men influenced my life considerably.

To the outside world, Liberia is more often than not portrayed in binary terms: Black repatriates from the New World, whose guiding ethos was the civilizing/Christianizing mission, and peoples indigenous to the Liberia area. Given the nature and orientation of education in the country, most of the post-World War II generation was fed a binary staple. My lived experience made me aware of a different situation. In the home where I was born and raised, there were also "wards" or children from rural communities brought to acquire an education in a Christian setting. In one instance, the ward was a blood relative of grandmother's, her father being of the Barchue clan. The reference here is to Josephine Greaves Shannon (1936–2015) and her father, David Greaves, who was himself a ward of the prominent Thomas H. Greaves family. It was a nuanced situation that witnessed the interplay of dissimilar Africa-rooted cultures mutually borrowing from one another. Language, food, customs, healing arts, dress, and religious syncretism were only some of the features of this cultural interpenetration.

There were many other mitigating circumstances as well. Perhaps the fact that my maternal grandparents who raised me, and who both had mothers that were ethnic Bassa was one such mitigating circumstance. Both grandparents also experienced lives as "wards" themselves in the home in Freetown of a Creole Sierra Leonean family. I want to believe that my experience is not unique. There are many Liberians who could relate a similar experience. All

of us children were largely raised to value the human person made in God's image and to revere modern education, for that was the pathway to a future wholesome life. These things left us with the impression that a person's worth resided in the content of his or her character. The finer points of integrating traditional culture with Western culture came much later in our development.

Almost 200 years of human interaction in Liberia may have resulted in a more nuanced reality than is found in the widely portrayed binary image. In my exile and retirement years, I have examined published obituaries of Liberians, many of them revealing experiences similar to my own, some clearly going beyond my experience. I believe there is need for serious research to assist in the settlement of the issue of the Liberian divide in the interest of truth, national reconciliation, and national unity.

I had a loving family that nurtured me well. I had very little sense of a world beyond Lower Buchanan, where I was born and nurtured. Monrovia felt distant. I was not born in wedlock, but my maternal grandmother was like my mother and my grandfather was like my father. On my mother's side, we were four as already indicated. I have three lovely sisters.

On my father's side, I would guess in excess of twenty, including brothers Roland Dunn (deceased), Edwin Lysander Dunn (deceased), Joseph Edward Dunn (deceased), James Alexander Dunn (deceased), Louis Arthur Dunn (deceased), Elbert Dunn (deceased), and Edward L. Dunn Jr. (Eddie), and the Rev. Emmett Dunn. My sisters included Caroline Victoria Dunn Tolbert (deceased), Edith Victoria Dunn-Samu (deceased), Mary Dunn Gadeh, and Ellen Louise Dunn. I define family largely by my mother, in particular by my maternal grandparents. This is the world I grew up in and to which I retain a strong attachment.

Again, my father was a politician and a gentleman farmer. He was superintendent of Grand Bassa County at a time when limited communication and transportation enabled him to wield considerable power, some calling him "governor" or the president's "vice gerent." I came to admire him because he appeared successful and was prominent. I aspired to be successful and financially comfortable. Those were things about him that I wanted to emulate, though there were many other qualities that I did not find attractive.

## Early Education

As noted earlier, I faintly remember being with my mother as a toddler at St. John's Episcopal Parish Day School, where she was probably a teacher, as my kindergarten schooling had started, though we were not then familiar with that term. My pre-primary years were spent at home in an unstructured fashion with cousins, aunt, and others. There we learned all the basics of an early education: speech, numeration, stories, tales, Christian education such as the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, etc. We also played and learned some of the same childhood songs and skits that our younger relatives were taught when formal kindergarten was introduced to our hometown.

I distinctly recall being in the first grade at St. Peter Claver's, my mother's alma mater. Paul Bropleh was my teacher. He later became a lawyer and a United Methodist pastor. I remained at St. Peter Claver's through the fourth grade, variously encountering as teachers Principal Fr. Francis Carroll, Irish missionary priest, teachers Pratt (later the prominent Catholic cleric, Fr. Robert Tikpor), Jacob Bernard, and Marylue Flahn Reeves. I was a mission border for part of this period and experienced mission life living in a dormitory with older boys. Augustus Pratt (later as physician Augustus Tah) was a classmate. Among the older boys were a number who later became prominent figures in Liberia. T. Nelson Williams, Sr., later married my first cousin and became president of the Press Union of Liberia, a Deputy Minister of Information, and dean of the Mass Communication Department at the University of Liberia. Ben Page became private secretary to the vice president of Liberia and an official of the Information Ministry. Bernard Blamo served as president of the University of Liberia and Foreign Minister. Michael Dolo, Francis Dortu, and Patrick Nah were among recruits from indigenous communities, a hallmark of the early Roman Catholic education ministry. Bropleh, Tikpor, and Jacob Bernard had enjoyed similar opportunities before they were employed as teachers.

At St. Peter Claver's, I experienced the Mass in Latin and thought God understood only Latin. Given my struggles with numeration and determined to mitigate her little boy's shortcomings, my grandmother hired a math tutor. While living briefly with my mother in Monrovia, I entered St. Patrick's Catholic School in 1952. I spent my final years of primary school at the elementary division of Bassa High School (BHS), a successor to the Methodist missionary Hartzell Academy.

From 1957 to 1960, I attended Bassa High whose motto was *Turris Lucis* (Tower of Light). Though then the only high school in the county, the enrollment was not large. Students came from St. Peter Claver's, from the Seventh Day Adventist school, as well as from nearby communities. Perhaps there were missionary-operated institutions serving elsewhere in the county. We benefitted from wonderful teachers that included many with college degrees from the University of Liberia (UL). They had been educated at the government's expense and were required to return to serve their home county. Among them were A.T. Summerville (later a diplomat), Philemon Harris (later a county attorney), Joseph Findley (later a judge and senator), Edward Harris (later a legislator), H.R.N. Woart (a former Episcopal priest and graduate of the old Cuttington in Cape Palmas), S. Loyola Fleming (later an official in the Education Ministry) and Nathaniel Hodge (our music teacher who was a classmate of my mother's). There were others who remained in the classroom molding young minds and preparing us for our futures. Among them were Samuel Findley, Gertrude McGill Findley (spouse of Joseph Findley), H. Godley Greenfield (also a United Methodist pastor), Estelle Greenfield Harris (spouse of Philemon Harris), Mary V. Massa Reeves (from Cape Mount County but who was married to military officer Augustus Reeves resident in Buchanan), and Bertha Dalmeida (French teacher originally of Sierra Leone origin). Bassa High School also enjoyed its complement of Indian science and math teachers sponsored by UNESCO. Professors K.N. Rao and Kurien easily come to mind.

We were of the "old school," that is, we were drilled in the rudiments of English grammar and composition, a splattering of English and American literature, a bit of civics, when we were given brief biographies of the presidents of Liberia, and highlights of other historical events without context, introduction to world history, and the sciences. We even had Charles Horace, a graduate of the Booker Washington Institute, teach us how to become "Future Farmers of Liberia."

Our senior year began with a class of six: Bertha Walker (McBorrough), Philip Tarr, Alexander Nyekan, Wilmot Roberts, Rebecca Williams, and me. Nyekan left to take advantage of training abroad for maritime work, leaving five of us. After graduation, Roberts and Tarr sought employment, as they deferred the college option. I don't recall where Williams went. Bertha and I continued on to college at UL.

I will never forget an episode in our senior year, when we were lined up for a pop test. I was asked a question by Prof. Philemon Harris, which I did not answer correctly. The same question then went to the sole female in the class, who incidentally went on to be the dux (valedictorian) of the class. She started

with the right answer but appeared doubtful. As she looked in my direction, I nodded that she was on the right track. Our teacher observed what was happening and spoke these words: "He saved others; himself he cannot save!"



## Post-secondary Education Formation

When I graduated from high school, the two choices for a university education were the University of Liberia in Monrovia and Cuttington College, an Episcopal school in central Liberia. I do not recall that the Cuttington option ever came up. I simply placed my sights on going to Monrovia for college, where UL was located. I do not recall any robust fatherly support of me in Monrovia. My older sister, Victoria Dunn-Tolbert, and her husband, Wilmot A. Tolbert, virtually fed me while enrolled at UL in 1961 and 1962. My father did, however, in my sophomore year, walk me over to the nearby Henries Law Firm, owned by his friend Speaker of the House or Representative Richard A. Henries. Father was instrumental in my acquiring an entry-level part-time typing job. I hardly saw Speaker Henries following the introduction, though I came to know some of the lawyers associate such as James Doe Gibson, James Yangbe, Robert Azango, and Victor Hne (chief secretary). I was there for a few months, before finding something better that also involved typing at a Lebanese merchant's store on Front Street. Through the influence of a cousin, I became later in 1962 a cadet (apprentice) at the Department of State where I served briefly as a typist.

While at UL, I lived on Clay Street, Crown Hill, in a small back room on my father's property. I depended on two sources for transportation to school when I did not walk: Patrick Jarteh and Carney Johnson (brother of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf). Jarteh was a BHS alumnus who was a year ahead of me at UL. He had the advantage of being a Forestry major which entitled him to a bus ride. So, as the forestry college bus came to pick him up near the YMCA building where we both lived, he vouched a ride for me. Carney Johnson had a Peugeot pickup, which he took to school at UL. I had met him on campus and later learned that he lived down Broad Street near me. I would stroll to him for a ride. This provided the second transportation opportunity.

Monrovia was for me a new world. College at UL was even newer. I had never before read a newspaper and could not understand the headlines. I was determined to overcome this and other challenges as I encountered fellow students from the leading high schools of the country, most of them concentrated in Monrovia. At UL, there were wonderful professors. I studied English with Edwin Varfley and Vivian Edwards, biology with P. Gideon and J.P. Joshua, geography and social science with Christopher Moses Minikon, math with Aloysius Farrah, history with Abeodu Bowen Jones, physics with Edward King,



music with Agnes Nebo von Ballmoos. Rocheforte L. Weeks was UL president at the time and Fatima Massaquoi Fahnbulleh was dean of liberal and fine arts. Varfley taught me to avoid making unwarranted “sweeping” conclusions, and Edwards advised writing essays far ahead of due date to allow the draft to “cool off” before revisiting it, when invariably some improvement could be made.

While at UL, I came across the commencement address Morehouse College's Dr. Benjamin Mays had given in 1960, the year before my arrival at UL. I read it carefully and was so impressed that I continue to carry the copy with my papers even today. It struck me as a classical presentation of the values of a liberal arts education.

In the wider context of the city of Monrovia, I met the Rev. Canon Burgess Carr fresh out of Cuttington's Seminary and on the staff of Trinity Cathedral under the deanship of his former college president, Fr. Seth C. Edwards. Two intense years of association soon followed: I, the acolyte; Carr, the priest. During this time, I was also acolyte at the state funeral for President Charles D.B. King who died in 1961. The year 1961 also witnessed the Monrovia Conference of Independent African States. I experienced the excitement of the frequent movements of presidential motorcades as more than 20 African heads of state were in Monrovia. Although a mere undergraduate from Grand Bassa County, I was being introduced to that part of Monrovia society that included not only Trinity Cathedral but also the YMCA under the secretary generalship of the congenial African American David Howell and the National Student Christian Council (NSCC), of which Bennie Warner (later Methodist Bishop and vice president of Liberia) was an official. It was a spectacular learning experience!

Because of my activity with Trinity's youth organization and my participation in NSCC activities, it was my good fortune to be a part of the Liberian delegation to the first All-Africa Christian Youth Assembly, which convened in Nairobi, Kenya, in late 1962. Foreign Service Inspector General Frank Stewart of the State Department (later budget director), where I worked, loaned me some pocket change money to facilitate my trip. Among the members of the delegation led by Burgess Carr (later secretary general of the All-Africa Conference of Churches) were Kenneth Best (later founder of Liberia's leading newspaper, the *Daily Observer*), Henry Reed Cooper (later chief justice of the Supreme Court), Gladys Kiawon (later associate justice of the Supreme Court), Yancy Peters Flah (succeeded Howell at the YMCA and later Deputy Minister at the Executive Mansion), and Charles Minor (later Liberia's ambassador to the US). An eye and mind opener, this was my very first travel out of Liberia (except Bingerville in Côte d'Ivoire, which was preparatory to the Nairobi gathering). This was also my first significant encounter with other African nationals, and my first sense of awareness of the place of Africa in the scale

of human civilization. I learned a lot, but what stood out to me was the fact that the expansion of early Christianity had left, in its trail, the Coptic Church of Egypt and the Orthodox Church of Ethiopia, long before Western missionaries brought Christianity in its Western garb to the rest of Africa. I marveled in Nairobi at the liturgies of these early African Christians as their worship services interspersed the conference activities.

Among the highlights of 1962 were UL Centennial celebrations and my role in Agnes von Ballmoos' and Godfrey Mills' University Choir. Bong County Senator Elizabeth Collins was the keynote speaker for the occasion. Some classmates during those two years that I recall include Henry Reed Cooper, Lucille Thompson, Thelma Nelson, Elizabeth Davis (Russell) (later president of Tubman University), Marie Leigh Parker, Elwood Jangaba (later associate justice of the Supreme Court), Francis Cooper (later an electrical engineer), Gillian Tulay Moore (fellow Episcopalian and later spouse of Bai T. Moore of the Information Ministry (MICAT), Amelia Hooke Ward (veteran Planning Minister and vice presidential candidate), Roland Smith Mokolor (journalist), and Bertha Walker McBorrow, my sole BHS classmate who became a biology instructor and a model mother.

After two years at UL, I transferred to Cuttington College and Divinity School at Suakoko in central Liberia. Why Cuttington? Unlike my decision to attend UL, which seemed accidental, Cuttington was my conscious choice. I seriously thought that I was destined for the priesthood in the Episcopal Church. The Sunday prior to my departure for Cuttington, Canon Carr called me up to the altar at Trinity to offer prayers and to acknowledge the path I was embarking upon. The renowned Episcopal cleric, the Rev. Fr. James David Kwee Baker who was present at the service invited me to his Front Street home for further encouragement, even displaying to me his priestly vestments that he was prepared to will to me. Fr. Baker died four years later when I was in school in France. My comfort level, however, was not high as doubts remained in my mind as to whether the priestly calling was mine.

When I arrived in Suakoko the atmosphere enthralled me. I felt as though I was entering sacred grounds as I passed the entrance gate. I was arriving at Cuttington only two years, since the history-making visit to the campus by the Kenyan nationalist Tom Mboya, and I was walking into a college environment consisting of students from a number of African countries and colonial territories agitating for independence. I was also joining a generation of Liberian students, who would later make names for themselves in terms of services they came to render country and church alike.

I liked the isolated feel of "a small, intimate, and very personal family school." I felt I could better focus on studies, which I soon began to do. I was impressed

with the caliber and commitment of the faculty. The aims and objectives of Cuttington defined my sense of what I was seeking and what I hoped to leave with upon eventual graduation. An early 1960s bulletin of the college put it succinctly: "Christian church-supported institutions have been the nexus bridging an illiterate past to an enlightened present and ushering in the new day of self-determination, freedom, and development in Africa." The bulletin continued:

Cuttington College and Divinity School is proud of its record in this metamorphosis. A Christian institution of higher learning, Cuttington College is dedicated to teaching of the arts and sciences, to promotion of moral and academic excellence, and to the quest for truth and knowledge. The founders of the college and their successors have consistently maintained that a high standard of scholarship, a lofty plane of conduct, and enthusiastic concern for truth, the dignity of work, and an appreciation of beauty in consonance with Christian living are the minimum qualities which should help equip the youth for responsible participation in a contemporary African society. The education program at Cuttington College and Divinity School seeks therefore, to (a) provide a liberal education that introduces the student to organized fields of learning; (b) assist the student to understand, respect, and critically evaluate the thoughts of others, and to express his own thoughts clearly, precisely, and effectively; (c) provide for concentrated study in a given field, after a general basic curriculum has been covered, and (d) help the student understand the meaning of life and his role in society.

At Cuttington I encountered Liberians from high schools as diverse as St. John's Episcopal of Cape Mount County, the Lutheran Training Institute (LTI) of Lofa County, Booker Washington Institute (BWI) of Kakata, St. Augustine High School of Bolahun, Suehn Industrial Academy, and a smaller number from Monrovia schools. There were students from Sierra Leone, Cameroon, Nigeria, Kenya, Tanganyika (later Tanzania), Rhodesia (later Zimbabwe), Uganda, Swaziland, Sudan, Lesotho, and Ethiopia as well.

The faculty and staff were equally diverse, though mostly of expatriate extraction: John Gay (philosophy and political science), John Walter Cason (African history and religion), Howard Collins (English and literature), Chaplain Oliver Chapin (psychology and religion), and Peace Corp Volunteers teaching a variety of subjects. At the time, Cuttington was led by President Christian E.W. Baker (elder son of Fr. J.D.K. Baker, who was encouraging me to become a priest), and Dean of Instruction Melvin J. Mason. Actually, the

African American educator Osborne Payne was acting dean in 1964, as Mason was back in the US completing his doctor of education degree (DEd.).

In my senior year, my fellow classmates elected me class president and, during graduation, I delivered a farewell address on December 5, 1964. The title of the talk was “The Role of the Educated in a Changing Africa.” Dr. John Gay commended my reference to American socialist, Eugene Debs, who wrote, “As long as there is a lower class, I am in it. As long as there is a criminal element, I am of it. As long as there is a man in jail, I am not free.” I reminded my fellow graduates of our class motto, which was: “With humility and love we serve mankind.” I ended the address by promising, “Much we have received at your hands dear instructors, staff and parents, much we go out to give to uplift suffering humanity.”

My words at graduation seem prophetic. Among the twenty-five members of the class of 1964 were Etmonia David-Tarpeh who became Minister of Education, Gladys Kiawon-Johnson who became a judge and associate justice of the Supreme Court, Juliette Phelps-Maxwell who became a physician, Harry F. Moniba who became Vice President of Liberia, Stephen Yekeson who became president of Cuttington and of the University of Liberia, and, myself, D. Elwood Dunn, who became Minister of State for Presidential Affairs and a college professor. Lucretia Cooper, Shirley Davis-Stewart, Cecil Dundas, Eva Johns, Gilate Twe, Edith Draper, Joseph Newman, and Henry Walker became educators; Walker, a principal at the Zorzor Mission. John Wealor became a veteran teacher at LTI, Elsie Jensen-Guwor became a dietitian, at one time with the Agriculture Ministry. Joseph Kamara became an agriculturist, serving for many years with the Ministry of Agriculture. Joseph C. Johnson became a physician. I do not have information on Stanley Johnson. Doris Roesler, who was a brilliant student and who once told me that she wanted to train to become a world-class economist, died, along with her mother, in a tragic automobile accident a few months following graduation. Hugh Gray of Costa Rica had a successful career in education in New York City before returning to his native Costa Rica to retire. Gregory Anekwe returned to his native Nigeria, and Hezekiah Awish, Hezekiah Nguru, and Hesbon Warinda returned to their native Kenya.

Several factors influenced my decision not to study theology. They included a closed divinity school, for want of students since 1962, and the inability of the Episcopal Church of Liberia to carry through a plan to send interested students abroad for training. Chaplain Oliver Chapin established a Christian club, “The Augustinians,” to encourage young men to consider the ordained ministry but that did not make any difference. The Dean of Trinity Cathedral, Fr. Seth C. Edwards, put forward a stopgap alternative for training clergy in Monrovia

at the cathedral. That effort became the Seth C. Edwards Memorial Institute that trained over the years a large cadre of priests, at least one becoming a suffragan and diocesan bishop of the church. By then, I had shifted my sense of vocation to viewing all human endeavors as ministries called to serve God's people. I was thus moving toward a ministry of diplomacy. I had read Hans Morgenthau's *Politics Among Nations*, taken a few courses in African history, history of the Americas, history of British West Africa, and an introduction to international relations. I also closely monitored the unfolding drama of African decolonization and felt my passion, and therefore my ministry, would be in the field of diplomacy and international relations.

My early education had features that were both uniquely Liberian and broadly African. In the 1940s, as already indicated, there were no formal kindergarten institutions. We were therefore largely schooled informally at home by relatives, beginning with what we called the "ABCs" through the primers. During this time, we learned a whole lot that entailed the rudiments of speech and numeration. For me, this was provided in a Christian context as the Lord's Prayer, the Apostle's Creed, and the Ten Commandments were taught. It was all rote learning as we memorized and regurgitated on demand. Underneath it all was the African notion of preparing children for their roles in society: what a boy or a girl required for their expected roles as they matured, including reverence and respect for authority figures. This meant parents and their many extensions in society.

As we advanced to the elementary and secondary levels in the 1950s, our education appeared to us to be more structured. Whereas the development of modern education in Liberia had begun with faith-based and private schools, the role of government became increasingly pronounced. We heard of Secretaries of Education Nathaniel Varney Massaquoi and John Payne Mitchell, Supervisor of Schools William F.R. Whitfield and James Henrique Smith. We also had the privilege of a cadre of Liberia College and later University of Liberia graduates to lead and teach, as well as UNESCO math and science teachers of Indian nationality.

The broader African context of our education was unmistakable. I was a freshman in high school in 1957, the year of Ghana's independence, and a sophomore in 1958, the year of Guinea's liberation from France. The 1959 Sanniquellie meeting that brought together Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Sékou Touré of Guinea, and William V.S. Tubman of Liberia did not go unnoticed. In my senior year, 1960, independence came to more than a dozen Francophone African states, and to Nigeria, the most populous African state. I recall government-proclaimed holidays to mark some of these events. We may not, at this time, have been fully aware of the impact of history on our

education. Fuller awareness would come in college, but we were clearly children of the “wind of change” that was blowing throughout Africa, as we were witnesses to the African “revolution of rising expectations.” We saw ourselves going somewhere, as we observed the African liberation holidays, paraded on October 24th or United Nations Day with the flags of member states of the U.N. I remember memorizing then the Preamble to the U.N. Charter.

Important though these events were, we were being educated with the mindset of a Christianizing and civilizing mission. This presupposed a Western way of life superior to the African experience. Christianity in its western garb accompanied this outlook. The consequences were enormous in terms of their impact on our society. Echoes persist today. However, post-World War II developments, with a world now open to acknowledging and advancing the rights of all peoples to self-determination and independence, the African liberation and Liberia’s engagements began a process of change that is ongoing. President Tubman’s internal policy of national unification, which drew inspiration from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and similar international instruments, contributed to the tempo of change. We were thus leaving that stage of our education embracing the mantra of change, equipped for critical thinking and prepared for life-long learning.

My mother’s parents placed a premium on educating their children. They sent their children to the best faith-based schools in town, the Methodist Hartzell Academy and the Roman Catholic St. Peter Claver’s. As my maternal grandparents came to raise me, and later my younger siblings, they sent us also to the Catholic school, followed by the Bassa High School, a successor to the Hartzell Academy. For me, my grandparents were my role models extraordinaire. They supplied my every need and gave me a sense of security, belonging, and purpose.

Buchanan was family, school, and church. The home was the place of nurture. The schools were extensions of that nurturing environment. The Christian faith became an early inheritance, as we were taught by precepts and examples at home and in the framework of the Christian Church, in my case, Bethel AME Church and, later, St. John’s Episcopal Church.

Upon high school graduation, Monrovia beacons. It was a new world that for me came to be defined by two years of college experience at the University of Liberia, and my religious and social associations with Trinity Cathedral of the Episcopal Church, the YMCA, led by the wonderful and congenial David Howell, and the National Student Christian Council, where I first met Burgess Carr, an Episcopal clergy, and Bennie Warner, a Methodist clergy, and much later vice president of Liberia.

Circumstances transitioned me to Cuttington College and Divinity School, where I completed my college education. In Suakoko, I came to deepen my attachment to school and church. I also began giving thought to the state, or to government service, as a career option. I was beginning now to think about possible futures. The human and material environment at Cuttington opened for me a window to the world – in particular the world of rural Liberia that I had not widely experienced and the African world to which I was being exposed through our international students. I graduated from Cuttington in 1964 and left Suakoko with some trepidation, as I wondered what would come next in my life, though I was determined to broaden and deepen what Cuttington had offered.

I was first hired as a typist at the Department of State in Monrovia, but I busied myself searching for a scholarship opportunity for graduate study abroad. I spent much of my free time at the United States Information Service (USIS) Library then located on Broad and Buchanan Streets, researching opportunities for study in the US. A French government public offer of scholarships came to my notice and I became a beneficiary. Two fruitful years were spent in France and then came the American opportunity at the American University's School of International Service (SIS), where I earned the MA in international relations and the PhD in international studies.



## Career Initiation

### *One Year at Department of State/1965*

Upon obtaining my undergraduate degree at Cuttington, I began searching for a job. When they learned of my search, Emmanuel Ricks and other good friends who had been ahead of me at Bassa High School, tried to guide me into high school teaching. Though I deeply appreciated their efforts, my sights were set on a career in diplomacy and my target was the State Department. A cousin alerted me to a clerical job opening at State. I applied and passed a typing test, and, with my freshly minted BA degree, I was employed as a clerk/typist in January 1965. My assignment was with the Central Office of the Department, which was headed by Chief Clerk Louise Ricks Samuels, and her assistant, Dondo Ware. J. Rudolph Grimes was the secretary of state.

Though my father had many decades earlier served Grimes' prominent father, Louis Arthur Grimes, as chief clerk in the Justice Department, there was nothing here of dynastic succession. In the first place mine was a lowly typist job where my father, perhaps like Mrs. Samuels, was a top-level administrator in a completely different department of government. Furthermore, I was too low on the pecking order to have any substantial relationship with Rudolph Grimes. I doubt that he even then recognized who I was. The only mention of a link between my time and my father's came post-1980 from Secretary Grimes' sister, University of Liberia's President Mary Antoinette Grimes Brown Sherman. As we interacted as academics, she remembered my father working for her father and said that her dad was so demanding that on one occasion he rolled up a letter or document and threw it at my father in public in a sign of anger and disapproval, apparently for the unacceptable quality of the work. A colleague then asked the attorney general, "Is this how you treat someone whom you habitually spoke so highly of?"

In the Central Office, we received and distributed all mail coming to the Department, particularly mail from the diplomatic pouch coming from our embassies abroad. We drafted routine letters for the secretary's signature and played a coordinating role in preparing annual reports of the Department for the legislature and the president. My colleagues in the central office included Anthony Nimley (later a professor at Fisk University), David Z. Howard (later an Episcopal priest), and Janet Ebba-Tubman (later a lawyer and a member of the National Elections Commission). Senior officials included Wilmot David as



under secretary, Ernest Eastman as under secretary for administration, Herbert Brewer as Counselor, assisted by lawyers Oliver Bright and M. Burleigh Holder.

The Department was divided into regional and functional bureaus, and it was charged with pursuing the president's foreign policy of support for African decolonization and developing an association of independent African states. In the past, Liberia was staunchly with the West in a bipolar world, strongly supportive of the UN, of which she was a founding member. Under Tolbert, Liberia also adopted a stronger stance of nonalignment between the two global power blocs of the US and the USSR, though she occasionally deviated in the interest of the West.

In 1965, I satisfied my curiosity about the Masonic Craft of Liberia by joining the secret organization. I do not recall whether the initiative was my father's or mine. What I do recall is that my father, who was a prominent Mason at both the level of the subordinate county lodge and at the level of the grand national lodge, arranged a dispensation for me, which enabled my initiation through all three degrees to a Master Mason in one evening. When the ceremony was done, I was excused from the refreshment time, as my father's peers may have felt I would prefer. I then drove home, and that was it.

A few months later in Monrovia, when I had already forgotten the password for entering a lodge, a relative encouraged me to attend a Monrovia lodge initiation occasion. The Masonic Temple was then located between Broad and Ashmun Streets, on Lynch Street. Whoever took me coached me with the necessary password. Upon entering the lodge, I discovered that Jallah Prall, a prominent banker, was being initiated. That evening, George Henries – later attorney general, a justice of the Supreme Court, and subsequently Grand Master of Masons of Liberia – and I were pressed into service. A few months thereafter, I left for study in France. I have, since then, never again associated with the Masonic Craft.

At the State Department, I developed a strong interest in diplomacy and saw myself in training for substantive roles in the future. Because of my access to incoming mail, when Secretary Grimes' magazines such as *US News and World Report* and *Newsweek* arrived, I would take them home to read before returning them in time to take to the secretary's office. With my mind focused on acquiring a scholarship to pursue graduate studies abroad, I read in the local dailies that the French government through its embassy in Monrovia was offering scholarships to college graduates to undertake studies in France. Having met French Ambassador Gabriel Morand, I decided to approach him directly. His polite advice to me was to have the State Department recommend me. Because Grimes was either indisposed or on a foreign mission, I approached Secretary Eastman, to whom I had easier access. For reasons probably of the personal

exercise of power, it took a little while before Eastman relented and recommended me to the French Embassy. I still have copies of the correspondence involving me, State, and the French Embassy in August and September 1965. An August 10, 1965, letter from the Embassy to Secretary Grimes announced that the French government had accepted William (Bill) Smith (Attaché of the Executive Mansion) and me (from the State Department) for scholarships to study in France. Bill Smith became a “ward” in President Tubman’s family, as his elder brothers had decades earlier been raised by Tubman. Abraham Smith, Bill’s father, was a schoolmate of Tubman’s, as the two men graduated together from the Methodist Cape Palmas Seminary. Their friendship from school continued and the fortunes of life explain how Tubman came to raise most of Abraham’s sons. The duration of our studies was to be three to five years. As shown by an August exchange of letters between Secretary Eastman and Secretary of Education Augustus Caine, the Education Department was an integral part of the process. The scholarship was to start November 1, 1965. The Liberian government subsidized the project with what was called a grant-in-aid or a supplemental stipend. Ambassador Morand’s last words to me were that I should study hard and do well in France so that I could return and become president of Liberia. That, of course, was never my ambition though I appreciated the gesture. More than a decade later encomiums would be heaped upon me by one of Morand’s successors, Ambassador Louis Dollot. In 1979, on the occasion of my installation as Minister of State for Presidential Affairs, Dollot referenced with pride that I had studied in France and spoke the language fluently.

With all set, that is, the scholarship and the government subsidy, Bill Smith and I left for Paris in October, 1965. In the afternoon of our departure, Bill arranged for me to meet President Tubman at the Executive Mansion. I went to the Mansion and waited more than two hours. As time passed, I grew concerned with the coming of darkness and the possibility that I would be late for my flight. Both anxious and eager to begin this first opportunity to study abroad, I left the Mansion without seeing Tubman. I then took a taxicab home to prepare myself for the airport. I would not see Tubman until at Bill’s suggestion we, students in Europe, went to visit him in Switzerland during one of his health trips.

Regarding the Switzerland meeting, I recall that several of us students were in the parlors of Tubman’s hotel suite, as he entered. He greeted us warmly, engaged in small talk, and then called his butler Jimmy Barolle, who returned with a bundle of \$50 bills. With all seated, we were told to take one of the bills and pass the bundle of money along. At the end we thanked the President, and he wished us well in our studies. That was the first of two encounters with

Tubman, the second being in 1968, while I was a graduate student at American University. At that time, Tubman visited Washington, D.C., where he met with President Lyndon B. Johnson.

Arriving in France, I benefitted from Bill's connection to the Executive Mansion. We were both met at the airport in Paris by First Secretary Peter Johnson (later an ambassador and a prominent politician) and put in touch with the appropriate French officials. Rather than the planned Strasbourg or Lyon as our destinations, we were sent south, I to Bordeaux and Bill to Toulouse. It was very cold and everything seemed new. I wondered how I would handle the language situation, especially given the difficulty I experienced with French at Cuttington.

## Student in France

It was a most difficult adjustment to climate, language, and culture, but I persevered so that within eight months I had acquired an adequate command of the language. I felt lonely in Bordeaux (Bill was married, and his wife had joined him), so I tried Strasbourg for the summer of 1966. Bill and I eventually transferred to the University of Lyon. In Bordeaux, I encountered Francophone Africa, as I made friends with students from a few French-speaking African countries. Countries such as Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Central African Republic, and Sénégal ceased being abstractions to me. Soon I would be able to read the newspapers in French about these and other African countries.

Bill and I both transferred to the University of Lyon for our second year of study. In Lyon, we met Liberian philosopher, Dr. Wolor Torpor, who was studying law. Nearer the French-Swiss border, I occasionally visited my cousin Toye Barnard (later Dean of the Law School at the University of Liberia) who was pursuing a doctorate degree in Lausanne. Edward B. McClain (later a physician and a minister in President Sirleaf's administration) and I. Van Fiske, a journalist with the Information Ministry, studying in nearby Besançon visited us in Lyon. I continued my language studies coupled with pursuing a certificate program in political science.

Soon it dawned on me that remaining in France to complete a graduate degree would mean more years than I was prepared to spend in Europe. I therefore began to plot a transfer to the United States. I applied to a few graduate schools and got accepted at Howard University in Washington, D.C. When through the Liberian Embassy in Paris I approached Secretary of Education Caine in June/July 1967, I received from the embassy the following encouraging cable message: "Reyourlet (regarding your letter) Student Elwood Dunn permitted to transfer to United States for Graduate work in Government or Political Science for two years maximum stop Analysis of his case shows this to be the easier and more economical course letter follows Regards Caine Seceduction." This was my opportunity. Dr. Augustus F. Caine, the secretary of education, was extremely helpful in approving my transfer request with a full government scholarship to do the MA in international relations.

## From Lyon to Washington, D.C.

As I arranged the logistics of my transfer, I reflected on what I had accomplished while in France. I had learned the French language and taken a few courses in diplomacy. I had also learned quite a bit about the French political system, and the role of France in the world as articulated by its larger-than-life President Charles de Gaulle. I witnessed, in December 1965, an election, which saw de Gaulle win the first direct presidential election, since his creation in 1958 of the French Fifth Republic. De Gaulle had won but not before being forced into a run-off with opposition candidate Francois Mitterrand, who performed so impressively in the run-off that it carried warnings of a decline in the General's political fortunes. I had read a portion of Gaullist former Prime Minister Michel Debre's *Au Service de la Nation* and was impressed with what I saw as commitment to service in a high government official. I followed the activities of Foreign Minister Maurice Couve de Murville, later acquiring his book *Une Politique Etrangere*, as I did Prime Minister Georges Pompidou who, upon de Gaulle's dramatic resignation in 1969, declared himself a candidate for the presidency, intoning, "I have the feeling, in declaring my candidacy, that I am simply performing my duty."

I also had been exposed to Francophone Africans in a way that opened for me a window to that part of the continent. It was time, I thought, to change course. I wanted to get on with my life, complete my studies and return home to start a career.

I was so anxious to reach the States and get graduate studies started that I failed to inform the university authorities in Lyon of my transfer plans. The French authorities learned of my departure after I had left and wrote to me a stinging letter of rebuke ("Your behavior lacks elegance and is reprehensible") demanding now that I do the honorable thing and write a letter indicating that I was giving up the French government scholarship. I complied without delay, apologizing profusely for my moral lapse, and expressing gratitude for the opportunity afforded me by the French government to study for two years in their prestigious institutions.

## Graduate Student in USA

### *American University*

Unlike the trip to Paris from Liberia in 1965, when I traveled with Bill Smith, I arrived in Washington, D.C., in the summer of 1967 all on my own. To no avail, I attempted to solicit late night assistance from the Liberian Ambassador. Left on my own, I found a hotel in downtown Washington, D.C. My next priority was establishing contact with Howard University. When I did, I discovered to my utter dismay that my correspondence with the institution could not be located. Though I displayed copies of the correspondence that enabled me to secure a student visa for the US, they could not produce their copies. Instead, I was advised by the Howard authorities to join the freshman orientation then underway until my situation could be sorted out. Discouraged, I followed prior advice from a relative, who had studied in the US, and found my way into the admissions office of American University (AU). I explained my situation, pointing out that I had secured a scholarship from the Liberian government, and implored them to consider my application for admission to their MA program in International Relations in the School of International Service (SIS). They were sympathetic and receptive. I was subsequently admitted. The Liberian Embassy confirmed my scholarship, and I began my graduate studies at American University (AU) in the fall semester of 1967.

I left the hotel and found a rooming house, where I spent the first several weeks before finding a Togolese friend, Louis Dovi Amaizo, who was registered in the MA in Public Administration program at AU. We together took a two-bedroom apartment at Mount Pleasant Place, subsequently moving to 16<sup>th</sup> & R Street, NW Washington. Louis and I would remain there together until we parted in 1970, as he had completed his studies and I was leaving Washington for my first real job at Seton Hall University in South Orange, New Jersey.

I soon entered upon my studies at AU with excitement and high interest. I met a Congolese classmate, Ghislain Kabwit, and later a Mozambican classmate, Luis Serapiao, and we have sustained our friendships to this day. Given the struggles of their respective countries for independence from European colonialism, I came to appreciate these two African countries at close range. I later had occasion to visit each of these countries when an official of the Liberian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I enrolled in courses on international relations, world politics, international organizations, American Foreign Policy,

the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, diplomatic negotiations, a seminar in French on France in World Affairs, and African regional studies. I even took some courses in downtown Washington at George Washington University under a consortium arrangement. These studies took place within the context of the Cold War, the Vietnam War, and independence consolidation in Africa even as the vestiges of colonialism were under attack.

We studied Innis Claude and Joseph Nye on international organizations, Hans Morgenthau and Henry Kissinger on diplomatic negotiations, Samuel Huntington on world politics, and Raymond Aron, Stanley Hoffman, and Reinhold Niebuhr on liberal theories of world politics. These scholars left a lasting impression on me. For the African world we read Ali Mazrui and the South African anthropologist Absalom Vilakazi. I read the historian Robert July, who led me to Edward Wilmot Blyden, Bishop Ajayi Crowther, Caseley Hayford, and others. I was especially attracted to Blyden whose writings helped considerably to shape my worldview.

I was in graduate school in Washington, D.C., in the late 1960s, a time of intense political upheaval and debate. The Civil Rights Movement was underway, as were the anti-Vietnam war protests. The year 1968 was a particularly eventful one, reminiscent of 2020 and the aftermath of the police murder of George Floyd. President Tubman's last visit to President Johnson, the campaign of Senator Robert Kennedy for the American Democratic nomination for president, Martin Luther King speaking at the Washington National Cathedral, his assassination in Memphis, and the assassination in California of Senator Robert Kennedy, all took place in 1968.

Tubman's visit was in early April, and I joined other Liberian students in a brief encounter at his hotel. It was no more than a casual handshake, no connecting whatsoever, as with the meeting in Switzerland of a couple of years earlier. As Tubman left for the next leg of his visit to New York, Johnson was on national TV, declaring: "I will not seek, nor will I accept the nomination of my party to be your president" in the forthcoming election cycle. Years later, Secretary E. Reginald Townsend of the Information Ministry would indicate to me how the Tubman delegation in New York received the news so soon after what they considered had been a successful visit with LBJ: "All [commitments] went down the tube" were Townsend's words.

One day when changing buses on my way to AU, I saw Senator Kennedy campaign in Washington in an open convertible sedan. He would be assassinated in California after winning that State's primary election for the Democratic nomination. I was also fortunate to attend on March 31, 1968, an event at the Washington National Cathedral where Martin Luther King was the speaker. I felt certain that I was a witness to history in the making as King spoke to



the subject “Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution.” In it he urged his audience to be aware of the challenges that are still present in the world, using the example of Rip Van Winkle, who slept for 20 years and woke to a place he knew nothing about. Before the month of April ended, and while we were in a late evening seminar class at AU, the shocking news came that King had been shot dead in Memphis, Tennessee. Again, as I changed buses on Connecticut Avenue on my way home, nearby 14<sup>th</sup> Street not far from the White House, buildings were on fire as African Americans exploded with anger at the news of King’s death. Stokely Carmichael’s slogan of “burn, baby burn” reverberated in the segregated Black neighborhoods.

The civil rights movement with the themes of restorative justice and affirmative action left an indelible imprint on my mind. So did the fallout from Kennedy’s assassination and his brother Senator Edward Kennedy’s paraphrase of George Bernard Shaw: “Some men see things as they are and ask why? I dream things that never were and say, why not?”

I internalized the anti-imperialism of the Vietnam protest, as I did the message of the civil rights movement. I experienced my first curfew, that of D.C. in the wake of the protests in the immediate aftermath of King’s assassination. I saw with horror the streets of D.C. being patrolled by armed soldiers on Easter morning 1968. A little more than a decade later, I would witness soldiers on the streets of Monrovia in the Liberian civil disobedience of April 14, 1979. These experiences were life lessons that I continue to carry with me: the struggle for social, cultural and political rights and affirmative action to redress historical inequities.

At the start of 1969, I received an invitation to give a talk on Liberia to a group of Peace Corp Volunteers in training in the US territory of St. Thomas. This was a novel but interesting experience, as I met and interacted with young Americans eager for some first-hand knowledge of Liberian life. This was also my first consulting work. I would be blessed with many more in my careers that lay ahead.

The year 1969 was also the year I completed the MA program and began seriously considering the PhD program at AU’s School of International Service. My reasoning: “You return home with an MA and become a diplomat. What happens if you fall out of political favor with the authorities, what would be your fallback position?” Later developments in my life – tension at the Foreign Ministry and the dramatic 1980 Coup – proved prescient. After being admitted to the doctoral program in July 1969, I focused the research and dissertation writing on the topic of President Tubman’s foreign policy as reflected in selected political issues in the UN. I first showed up at UN headquarters library in New York City and was directed to New York University that had a full set



of UN archives. I did my primary research at NYU, supplemented by material from the Library of Congress and an important 1970 interview in New York with Secretary of State J. Rudolph Grimes and his special assistant, M. Burleigh Holder. I completed my work and received my degree on May 21, 1972.

These academic accomplishments would not have been possible without the support and encouragement of many, among them a few Liberian government officials such as the Director of Scholarships at the Education Department, Gabriel E. Knuckles, Education Secretary Dr. Augustus Feweh Caine, and two successive student advisers and Cultural Attachés at the Liberian Embassy, Evangeline Varmah and Thelma Reeves. Caine authorized my transfer from France to the US, and he subsequently approved my request to pursue the PhD. Reeves was unwavering in her support and encouragement, as it was she who convinced Dr. Caine to allow me to pursue the PhD. When I completed the PhD and went to report to the Embassy, Diplomat George Wallace (Later Foreign Minister of Liberia) greeted me with the words “A doctor is in the house!”

Once I had completed residency requirements for the terminal degree and secured approval of my dissertation topic, I sought and acquired my first teaching job. Actually, it was my Mozambican colleague who brought the job opening to my attention. Dr. Thomas Patrick Melady of Seton Hall University had just been appointed as US ambassador to Burundi and so resigned his position teaching African Studies in the Department of Asian Studies and Non-Western Civilizations. When a Zambian candidate for the job, Dr. Mtshali, could not get to the States in time, Dr. John B. Tsu, chair of the department, hired me.

## Seton Hall, 1970–1974

### *Academic Career Launched*

I started as an instructor at Seton Hall in the fall semester of 1970. Among the courses I taught initially were African History, African Civilization, and African Literature. Not too long after, Seton Hall established a Center for Black Studies, and the leadership of that center engineered my transfer to Black Studies, teaching the same courses, but adding others as time and circumstances warranted.

I engaged in “moonlighting” or supplemental part-time teaching at Fordham University at Lincoln Center in New York City and at Essex County College in Newark, NJ. At Fordham in 1973, I was an adjunct assistant professor in the Black Studies Department of the Liberal Arts College teaching a course on the Decolonization of African Nations, while teaching a course on African Literature at Essex County College. The Black Studies communities at Fordham, Seton Hall, and Essex County were closely linked to the civil rights movement. The progressive mayor of Newark, Kenneth Gibson, and some members of his team were associated with Seton Hall’s and Essex County’s Black Studies. The Black politics of that era was not always welcoming to Africans like me. I perceived my teaching as geared toward improving the understanding of Africa and Africans and made that my focus. I remained engaged with these American schools for four years. I also joined the African Studies Association (ASA) and the Liberian Studies Association (LSA), respectively, at this time. This was the genesis of my research career.

Perhaps my reaction to the political and philosophical issues of the era would have been otherwise had I enrolled at Howard University’s graduate school. When a situation arose to politically engage at AU, it was largely an undergraduate students protest related to the Vietnam War. I saw no graduate student involvement. Besides, it is not my temperament to be involved in such activities, noble though they are. My focus for the duration of my stay at AU was academic work, with obvious interest in attending lectures and public addresses on the burning issues of the day.

Other than social associations, I recall meaningful friendship with few African Americans while in D.C. My associates were largely Diaspora Africans and other immigrant persons. I did, however, meet and establish friendship with two American couples, one of which, Patrick and Esther Malloy, remained

for long a part of my family. They came to our rescue during the 1980 coup in Liberia, and we sent our two young children from Liberia to them while we arranged exile for ourselves. The other American couple was Barbara and Pete Davis. I was able to re-establish contact briefly with them upon my return to the US in 1980/81 but have since lost touch.

My employment with Seton Hall opened up a different experience. As I transitioned from Asian Studies and non-Western Civilizations to Black Studies, I came to learn and experience how the civil rights movement had spawned an academic discipline. While retaining my interest in studying and teaching about Africa and Africans, I was influenced enough to read some radical Black and African scholars. The African American historian John Henrik Clarke and the Senegalese scholar Cheikh Anta Diop were among the scholars I read, incorporating some of their thinking into my teaching.

As it was during this period that I affiliated with both the ASA and the LSA, I became aware of the 1969 establishment of the African Heritage Studies Association, a radical challenge to Eurocentric orthodoxy that some considered a hallmark of the ASA. In time ASA seemed to have absorbed the AHSA, as all shades of opinion seem now reflected in ASA scholarship. These manifestations of demands on the American status quo affected another institution I was familiar with, the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Episcopal Church. The assassination in 1969 in Liberia of the last African American missionary Bishop Dillard H. Brown, along with Black American demands on their church, led to significant shifts in the almost 200 years of relations between the Episcopal Church of Liberia and the Episcopal Church of the United States.

## Marriage in 1971

Nineteen seventy-one was an eventful year for me, as I was married to Matilda Eeleen Greene in Washington, D.C., on January 30th. Regrettably, 50 years later, shy three weeks and a few days, Matilda died following complications from kidney disease and breast cancer on January 4, 2021. The loss was deeply felt by me and our family of four children, who were now all adults. Though in the late 1960s, as I contemplated marriage and considered other possible partners, I looked for a Liberian wife. I met Matilda in Washington, D.C., attending Howard University's undergraduate school. We soon began developing bonds of affection. She was from Sinoe County, and lived with her brother and his family. I had only distant knowledge of her family in Liberia. I came later to learn that she was from the Greene family of Sinoe County, whose then Senator James Edward Greene would become President Tolbert's first vice president. I found Matilda to be attractive and of a demeanor that could make for a permanent union. Our realized union of almost 50 years amply confirmed this hunch of mine, as we supported each other through our respective careers of service, she as teacher and pastor, and I as public official and teacher.

I was also ready to implement one of the cardinal things my grandparents had raised me to realize in life: marriage and a stable family. I proposed to Matilda while on the verge of completing the doctorate degree and she accepted. Dr. Tsu and a few Seton Hall faculty attended the happy occasion, as did some of my AU professors. I now had a wife, and then a son came along on September 19, 1971, Daniel Elwood Dunn, Jr., our firstborn. To my teaching responsibilities was now joined the responsibilities of a husband and a father.

Over the years, our family would grow and the children would go on to become their own persons. Daniel Elwood Dunn, Jr. (whom we call Dan) pursued his college education at Bloomfield College, his mother's alma mater, where he received a BA degree in English. We would go on to have three more children. Our second child, Chandra Rachel Dunn was born in Liberia on February 7, 1976. She did her undergraduate studies at Mount Holyoke College, a master's and a PhD at my alma mater, American University. Germaine Sunu Dunn, our third child and second female came along on April 26, 1981, while we were residing in New Jersey searching for employment, having just begun a life of self-exile from our homeland. Her college education was at Amherst College, and a law degree from the University of Virginia Law School. She has a son, our first grandchild, Abram Elwood Dunn. Our last child, Sedar Thomas

Dunn was born in Tennessee, November 18, 1987. He chose Sewanee to help out his aging father. With a Sewanee degree in economics, he did his MBA at Mercer University in Georgia. Sedar and his lovely wife, Ashley gave us our second grandchild, Lucas Thomas Dunn. All four of these gifts from God are out there in the world holding their own and contributing to their societies.

Following our marriage in 1971, I was young and full of energy. Liberia was always on my mind, so that, as soon as I completed the doctoral program, I began exploring opportunities at home. I was at the public library in Newark, New Jersey, working on my dissertation, when, in July 1971, my wife surprisingly showed up to break the news to me that President Tubman had just died. Once I had absorbed the surprise, I began to remember how I was advised by my American professor at AU (who was also an official of the US State Department) not to select a Liberian topic for the dissertation that could land me in trouble in Tubman's Liberia. He offered this advice, because he knew of my passion to pursue a career at home. In spite of his warning, my research focused on Tubman's foreign policy. The title of my subsequent dissertation was "The Foreign Policy of Liberia as Reflected in Selected Political Questions in the United Nations." Now that the President was dead, the concerns of my professor became moot. The dissertation was ready in early 1972. All other requirements for the degree were completed in time for graduation; I was awarded the PhD at graduation convocation on May 21, 1972.

Before the year ended, I went home to report to the Education Ministry and seek permission to return for some practical experience before a permanent return home. Then Education Secretary George Flamma Sherman tried to persuade me to become Student Adviser & Cultural Attaché at the Liberian Embassy in Washington. I already had a job at Seton Hall, so I did not accept. Nevertheless, my request to return to the US was granted.

While on this trip, I visited Byron Tarr at the Finance Ministry. Through Byron's older brother, Philip Tarr, who was my high school classmate, I had come to know of Byron. We had established contact while in graduate school and we completed our respective degrees in 1972, he in economics at the University of Illinois/Urbana. Byron had joined Finance Minister Stephen Tolbert's staff as an assistant minister and a senior advisor. Byron and I bonded at that meeting in his office in 1972. We would remain friends and colleagues, writing a book together and collaborating widely and broadly on Liberian affairs until his death in 2017.

While resuming my job at Seton Hall, I continued plotting my permanent return home. An offer came from University of Liberia President Advertus Hoff to be Dean of Liberia College. Dr. Hoff, I learned, had difficulty relating to a new breed of students at UL and sought to run the university, as though

it was a faith-based secondary school. I did not consider conducive the internal political atmosphere at the university, and so I declined the offer. I wrote a vague letter to President Tolbert about my desire to return home, and he graciously replied encouraging me to do just that. My correspondence with Foreign Minister C. Cecil Dennis, Jr. was more direct, perhaps because I had met with him in person when he attended the UN General Assembly in 1973, the year of his own appointment to the position. Dennis responded with an offer for me to head the Foreign Service Institute at the level of an assistant minister of foreign affairs. I accepted.

When I finally reached home in August 1974, I was given the glorified title of Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs for North American Affairs & Director of the Foreign Service Institute. This was after our family of three – Matilda, our toddler son, and me, with all our earthly belongings – had made the transatlantic journey in an iron ore vessel that took us all of three weeks to reach Liberia. The ship's captain informed us of US President Nixon's resignation, while on the high seas. After stopping in the Portuguese Azores and then anchoring for far too many days in the Conakry harbor in Guinea, we finally arrived at the Freeport of Monrovia and disembarked to family and friends, ready to start my career in earnest. I shortly undertook the private ritual of destroying my American "green card" by cutting it into small pieces and disposing of it. I had come home to fulfil my purpose and live out my days, never needing again to reside abroad, or so I thought.

I was returning home after nine years of study abroad, two in France and seven in the United States, the last two years honing my teaching skills. This was ten years after I had graduated from Cuttington. They were years well spent. I had learned French, acquired insight into the French political system, and also experienced exposure to Francophone Africa. These would all be useful once I embarked on a diplomatic career, even a bureaucratic one. I had also acquired an MA in international relations and a PhD in international studies. Though these accomplishments were made possible because of the foreign scholarship programs, respectively, of the French government and the Tubman administration, Under Secretary of State T. Ernest Eastman and Education Secretary Augustus Feweh Caine played key roles in opening the doors to these opportunities.

My life's plan was being realized, as I had married and started a family at age 29 and acquired the doctorate degree at age 30. I also had four years of teaching experience under my belt. As a student of international relations, I was conscious that we lived in a bipolar world in which the US and the USSR competed for influence. Slowly, I began to comprehend Liberia's role in this environment. I supported Liberia's efforts in organizing African unity and participating in a

non-aligned countries movement with the promise of “Third World” solidarity. Small countries such as Liberia would concert their efforts through engagements with organizations of the developing countries. Liberia’s role in the UN was highlighted in my mind. The historic ties to the US claimed my attention even then, and it was an attention grounded in suspicion given the observed diplomatic hypocrisy of praising the Liberian regime publicly, while privately criticizing it, not with a view to reform but with abandon. I was in a learning mode about something I would uncover in abundance once I began research in the National Archives of the United States many years later and started reading the diplomatic dispatches from the American Embassy in Monrovia to the State Department in Washington, D.C. My interviews with high-level American diplomats confirmed my suspicions.

As regards Liberia, my graduate studies were eye opening. With all of the inadequacies of the existing literature and the limited scope of those, largely non-Liberians, engaged in Liberian studies, the starkness of two Liberias did not escape me, even as I began slowly to appreciate the nuances as well. I had read the two primary studies propounding a “black colonialism” paradigm for understanding Liberia: the Nigerian, Monday Benson Akpan’s “The African policy of the Liberian settlers, 1842–1932: A study of the native policy of a non-colonial power in Africa,” (PhD, Ibadan University, 1968), and the American, J. Gus Liebenow’s *Liberia: The Evolution of Privilege* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell Univ. Press, 1969). My first read of these two studies was not with a critical eye, something that would come later as my horizon broadened. A line in my doctoral dissertation regarding the Liberian social divides reads: “There was only one way of righting the wrongs on both sides – the pursuit of unity.” I would later in my career embrace the mantra of “national reconciliation” as a critical avenue to national development. Or, to quote a line spoken in the 1950s by then Grand Bassa County Superintendent G. Flamma Sherman regarding President Tubman’s unification policy: “The policy of unification as defined and practiced by President Tubman is, I maintain, an indispensable prelude to national solidarity and national progress.” Graduate school was but the beginning, not the end, of my quest to better understand my country, its internal struggles for political and cultural unification, and its standing in free Africa and the wider world. Intense research, geared toward deeper understanding, would come years later, but I was returning home with my mental antenna elevated to capture and relate to all of the vibrations now enhanced by the end of the Tubman era. Even before Tubman’s death, the established social and political order of inequality was in retrenchment, and with his death there emerged on the horizon a more hopeful future trajectory under President Tolbert.



I first met President Tolbert in New York in 1973 but the connection was superficial as there was no personal conversation or engagement. I was, however, impressed by the breath of fresh air occasioned by his expressed support for the constitutional guarantees of free speech and free assembly following the stultification of these fundamental rights during the Tubman administration.

I welcomed the changes I saw on Liberia's horizon, considering them as compatible with my experience growing up in Grand Bassa County. Though the vision was blurred for me, the reality was a blend of many Liberias and many Liberian values. Until I was probably 8 or 9 years old, I had never been treated with modern medicine. My grandmother walked into the bushes from our back door and fetched herbs that healed our childhood illnesses; and a Liberian herbalist circumcised me. My grandparents, who had little formal education themselves, were adamant that we acquire all the modern education we could. While not uniformly negative, the experience with my father taught me lessons about what to avoid, as in the case of a justice system that privileged "big people" over "small people." It was this that I saw when my father sued my grandparents, as I saw my father, robed as a lawyer and sitting with other lawyers, as the Court declared, without a hearing, a judgment in my father's favor. These experiences led me to approach things cautiously and avoid the limelight. When serving in government, I deliberately picked my friends, keeping most others at arms length. Some would come to view with suspicion my choice of friends.

I considered myself then, as now, to be of a somewhat reserved disposition, cautious in my approaches, abhorring confrontation, and preferring instead to iron out differences through mutual accommodation. I accept at face value that diplomacy is the "art of compromise" and consider myself a champion of evolutionary change given the complexities of human nature.

My older sister, Victoria Dunn-Tolbert, and her husband, Wilmot Tolbert, gave me and Matilda a combined graduation and marriage gift of a plot of land in Paynesville, a Monrovia suburb. We would ourselves purchase an adjoining plot from Ambassador C.T.O. King, and on the two lots we subsequently built our first and only house in Liberia that was completed in 1976. As socially expected of me, I needed property in my home county of Grand Bassa. So, a few years later, I purchased five acres of land in the Township of Neekreen, near my hometown of Lower Buchanan. That land was not developed before the onset of instability and war in Liberia. Following the crises, I attempted to locate the land but experienced so much difficulty that I decided to abandon my effort and simply hold on to what is called the parent deed. Upon Matilda's death, I donated the land to the Episcopal Church of Liberia.



## Government Service

*Foreign Ministry, 1974–1977*

I arrived at my first post at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with a certain alacrity, given my own state of mind and the reception accorded me especially by those employees whom I had left, when I departed for study in France in 1965. I was grateful that the Director for European Affairs Trohoe Kpagahai allowed me to share his office space, while my office was being prepared. Little did I know then that three years later I would perhaps permanently be leaving the Ministry in an unceremonious manner.

Once somewhat settled in Monrovia, I presented myself to Foreign Minister Dennis. He, in turn, took me to the Executive Mansion to introduce me to President Tolbert. The President welcomed me home and remarked that I should have begun work “yesterday.” My title was Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs for North American Affairs (a newly created title) and Director of the Foreign Service Institute (FSI).

I was 32, when commissioned by Dennis on 6 September 1974. I had come to join what I considered a progressive regime with a reform agenda. The team in place included Deputy Foreign Minister for Administration, Robert Francis Okai, Deputy Foreign Minister Turner Stewart, Assistant Minister Nathaniel Eastman, Special Assistant to the Minister Gerald Padmore, Director for European Affairs Trohoe Kpagahai, Assistant Minister for African and Asian Affairs Charles Ansumana Cooper, Director of International Organizations Affairs Soni Sherman, Counselor John Togba, Chief of Protocol Leonard DeShield, Director for Economic Affairs Edwin Varfley, Director for Press & Information Philip Kiadii, and Director for Security Affairs Hugh Peabody. This was a mix of the old and the new, the young and the more seasoned. Though Liberia had yet to arrive at social inclusiveness, that idea was like the proverbial elephant in the room.

Considering myself a reluctant politician, I looked askance about certain aspects of the existing governance arrangement. My first episode of discomfort came a few months into my time at the Ministry when I was asked to substitute for the Minister on the high table at a public function along with Finance Minister Stephen Tolbert and Dr. A. Doris Banks Henries of the Education Ministry. The occasion was probably Matilda Newport Day on December 1. Uncomfortable with participating in the anniversary of an event I regarded as

divisive – research had revealed that the episode of a repatriate woman igniting an explosion that massacred indigenous people was mythical, not factual – I wrestled with this first challenging assignment. In the end, I relented and participated, though with little enthusiasm. I happened to be accompanying Minister Dennis to the office of Finance Minister Tolbert, when another troubling incident occurred. As I was walking behind the Minister about to enter Tolbert's office, his notorious Haitian bodyguard intercepted me, apparently never having seen me. There were apologies, but the incident fed my discomfort. Others awaited me.

In the aftermath of President Tolbert's inauguration in January 1976, there were changes in the Ministry. Ambassadors Lafayette Diggs and T. Siafa Sherman replaced Stewart and Okai as Deputy Ministers. Trohoe Kpagahai and Soni Sherman were promoted from the ranks of director to those of Assistant Ministers. John Weseh McClain was brought in from the Finance Ministry as Assistant Minister for Economic Affairs following Finance Minister Steve Tolbert's death in 1975. McClain replaced Varfley but was upgraded. In 1976, McClain transferred to the Executive Mansion as Deputy Minister of State. Varfley transferred to the Executive Mansion as Deputy Minister of State Without Portfolio, though he would soon again transfer to Public Works as Deputy Minister. Ambulai B. Johnson (cousin of future President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf) was brought in to handle economic affairs at the Foreign Ministry though at the lower rank of a director. Marjon Kamara (later Sirleaf's last Minister of Foreign Affairs), then a young research assistant in African and Asian Affairs, was promoted director of African affairs in the division. Dr. Joseph Saye Guannu, whose return from his own study abroad was then imminent, would occupy the post of Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs and director of the Foreign Service Institute. Ambassador Nathaniel Eastman had been posted abroad, and I had, a few months earlier, made the lateral move to the office of the Special Assistant to the Minister in 1975 following Steve Tolbert's death. The musical chairs of the politics of personalities implicit in the personnel adjustments was for me bewildering, though I came to appreciate some of it to my chagrin much later.

Within the year I reopened the FSI and had trained a first cohort of Liberians for posting to our diplomatic missions abroad. I began the program in late 1974 with national TV and Radio interviews to which the public responded with interest and enthusiasm. January 3, 1975 was the formal opening with 14 courses, two of which I taught. Among those who aided with lectures at the ad hoc program were Professor Amos Sawyer of UL, veteran Diplomat J.S.O. Coleman, Economist William Smith of the National Bank, Deputy Finance Minister Gerald Padmore, Professor C.E. Zamba Liberty of UL, Professor Worlor Torpor

of UL, Dr. Charles Clarke of the Executive Mansion, Counselor John Togba of the Foreign Ministry, Soni Sherman of the Foreign Ministry, and Professor Vashti McClain Padmore of UL. Retired Ambassador Henry Ford Cooper gave a lecture on April 16, 1975. There were 95 students in all, among them were Wade Thompson-Merchant, Olivia Shannon, Jonathan Reffel, Morris Dukuly, Leroy Urey, Sylvester Gbeintor, Miatta Fahnbulleh, Sylvia Harris, and Milly Buchanan.

The new North American Affairs Department was organized and functioning as I began writing memos to the Minister. One memo addressed tension in relations between Firestone and government, which resulted in tension between government and official Washington, leading to rumors that the US government was discouraging further foreign investment in Liberia. In May 1975 the controversial American assistant secretary of state for African Affairs, Nathaniel Davis visited Liberia. As my counterpart, I was in the party accompanying him to see President Tolbert at the Mansion and I took notes at the meeting. Davis was controversial because he had had no prior Africa experience and he was coming from service in Latin America with a pronounced anti-nationalist and anti-communist orientation. Most African leaders were critical of Davis' appointment, some publicly voicing their views.

The year following my appointment to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs proved to be eventful. South African Prime Minister John Vorster made a controversial visit to Liberia. Finance Minister Tolbert died in a plane crash. I succeeded Gerald Padmore as special assistant to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Even before these events, I took on an additional assignment outside of government. In late 1974, the president of Cuttington University College, Rev. Emmanuel W. Johnson, approached me, explaining that they had to dismiss Professor Dew Mayson in mid-semester because of apparent ideological differences. Mayson was outspokenly highly critical of the government's policies. Fr. Johnson, a conservative Episcopal priest and veteran educator, did not appreciate the political agitations that Mayson brought to the Cuttington campus. President Johnson therefore wanted me to consider commuting to Suakoko in Bong County to teach two of Mayson's courses and thus fill a critical vacancy. At the same time, Cuttington recruited Assistant Planning Minister Paul Jeffy to teach economics on the same basis. Although we both had heavy responsibilities in government, Paul and I agreed to fill the vacuum occasioned by Mayson's departure. We felt a responsibility to serve students, now without teachers and desirous of graduating on time. We were picked up from our offices at the end of the workday on Friday and driven to Suakoko in a Cuttington vehicle. We would spend Friday nights there, teach all day Saturdays, and then return to Monrovia on Saturday evenings. We did this between March and June, 1975 with the reluctant acquiesce of Minister Dennis. I had completely forgotten

who the students were before being reminded many years later by Chief Cyril Allen (who was then a senior official in the administration of President Charles Taylor) that I was his weekend professor.

The first major event in 1975 was the visit in February to Liberia of the Prime Minister of apartheid South Africa, John Vorster. He came in furtherance of his Africa policy of dialogue or *détente* in relations with African states. Few African leaders responded to the overture, though among those who did respond were President Kaunda of Zambia and President Houphouët Boigny of Côte d'Ivoire, but who employed diplomatic discretion. President Tolbert, for his part chose a course that left him politically vulnerable. Though billed as a secret visit, Tolbert did not adequately cover his flanks. He explained that he had sufficient intelligence to believe that he could persuade Vorster to grant independence to Namibia and begin the process of substantive change in South Africa itself. The visit was arranged by Finance Minister Stephen Tolbert (Vorster spent the night at Steve's house in Bentol). I was among officials at the Foreign Ministry, who had no idea about what was happening. We heard reports that a strange aircraft had landed in the middle of the runway at Roberts International Airport (RIA) and that the airport had been temporarily closed. It was only when Vorster had departed the country that BBC got wind of the visit and revealed the details to the world. Africa was furious, one headline reading "Liberia Welcomes Africa's Enemy Number One!" There were misgivings at home as well, as President Tolbert struggled to explain his motive. The initiative of the Vorster visit was the Executive Mansion's, and Foreign Minister Dennis was apparently made to go along with it. Later, Dennis would engage in an expensive shuttle diplomacy attempting to explain Tolbert's motives to the leaders of member states of the OAU. The unsuccessful effort led Tolbert eventually to abandon his dialogue with the apartheid regime.

The next major event of 1975 was the death of Finance Minister Stephen Tolbert and members of his staff in a plane crash in the evening of April 29. Tolbert had spent the day in Sinoe County on a government mission, and he overruled the reluctant pilot of his private executive jet, which took off from Greenville at night headed for Monrovia. Given the larger-than-life role in his brother's administration, the death of Finance Minister Tolbert on April 29, 1975, reverberated far and wide. There were speculations in Liberia and press reports in Nigeria of a CIA role in the plane crash. The Liberian government made inquiries to the American government. The US replied, claiming to have conducted a thorough investigation of the allegations. In an American Embassy letter of August 19, 1975, signed by Charge d'Affaires ad interim Maurice D. Bean, the US government categorically denied all of the allegations in the matter. The Monrovia rumor mill was perhaps summarized by a

remark I heard in the corridors of the Foreign Ministry the morning of April 30<sup>th</sup>, namely, that retribution awaited anyone who tried “messing with God’s little acre” (meaning, Liberia).

It was less than a year upon my return home that Finance Minister Tolbert died. I had virtually no contact with him, though in the press I read critical views about him, notably those of the pamphleteer Albert Porte as captured in Porte’s “Liberianization or Gobbling Businesses” publication. In this, Porte was pointing to egregious conflicts of interest on part of Minister Tolbert. The Finance Minister hardly knew who I was as I recall his behavior at ELWA hospital, where we both showed up one afternoon to console Byron Tarr, whose young son was fighting for his life following a tragic swimming pool accident.

Stephen Tolbert’s death, as already indicated, led to changes at the Finance Ministry that affected me. Following the Finance Minister’s death, my colleague Gerald Padmore was made Deputy Finance Minister, thus leaving vacant the post of Special Assistant to the Foreign Minister. In June, Minister Dennis asked me to join his office as his special assistant retaining the rank of Assistant Minister. The transfer from the position of Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs for North American Affairs to Special Assistant to the Minister of Foreign Affairs was at best a lateral move. I accepted the move hoping in part that at closer quarters I would have a bit more influence with Minister Dennis, though I appreciated the perils of proximity as well. I came in time to experience a bit of both influence and the perils of proximity. Gerald Padmore’s proximity led him to mention to me, as I joined the Ministry in 1974, that the show of running the Ministry was largely Dennis’ and his. I sensed that much shortly after I joined the Ministry. There was little real collaboration with other staff. Officials within the Ministry were contacted by the Minister’s office largely on the basis of need. It was not a team Ministry. I addressed this problem in a memo I wrote to Minister Dennis in 1976.

As Padmore had done during his tenure, I would travel the world with Dennis, attending meetings of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the Nonaligned Countries Movement, and the United Nations. Starting in 1975, Minister Dennis and I were at all UN General Assembly sessions and occasionally at meetings of the Security Council. We also participated in the ministerial and summit meetings of the OAU in Uganda (1975), Mauritius (1976), Gabon (1977), OAU Liberation Committee meetings in Zambia and Tanzania, and Nonaligned Countries meetings in Peru (1975), Sri Lanka (1976), and Algeria (1977).

Travelling with Minister Dennis gave me the opportunity to meet presidents and prime ministers of African states and those also associated with the non-aligned movement. In 1976, I was with Dennis at meetings with

Algerian President Houari Boumedienne, with Sri Lanka Prime Minister Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike, and with President Hafez Al-Assad of Syria. From 1975 through 1977, I also attended the OAU Summits in Uganda (1975) and Mauritius (1976). For some countries and leaders, these were fateful times. The Israeli raid on Entebbe, Uganda took place while the OAU was in session in Mauritius, forcing Ugandan President Idi Amin to return home on July 3. Nigeria's Military Leader Yakubu Gowon was overthrown while at the Uganda Summit in 1975. From our seat in the conference hall, I observed Gowon's reaction, as an aide informed him that he had been overthrown. I also accompanied the Minister in 1976, when he travelled as a special envoy of President Tolbert conveying messages to the leaders of Zambia (February), Guinea and Sierra Leone (May), Tanzania (September), and Nigeria (October).

In our many travels, we had briefs to follow and mandates to execute. President Tolbert was the decider of Liberia's policy and the foreign policy establishment, headed by Foreign Minister Dennis, was charged with implementing the decisions. When I was at the Foreign Ministry, the policy determined by Tolbert would be incorporated into talking points, speeches, memos, and a variety of other documents. We would typically advance policy first at the level of African organizations, next at the level of the non-aligned movement, and, finally, at the level of the UN for global endorsement and action. Intense communication involving the three levels was a critical feature of our diplomacy.

It is generally accepted that foreign policy is the course of action and related decisions that countries undertake in pursuit of their national interests. In theory, therefore, foreign policy is consistent with domestic policy, a projection of the welfare and wellbeing of a nation's people onto the global arena. One of my problems with Liberia's policies was that we did not take our cue sufficiently from our domestic circumstances. In the international domain, we were often in sync with the progressive policies of fellow Africans, fellow third worlders, and, at times, fellow member states of the UN. However, we left the domestic situation to the interplay of political forces on the ground. It was as though we were content with a progressive foreign policy that occasionally attended to the welfare of the Liberian people but not to the degree that addressed contradictions and other incompatibilities. Julius Walker, a US diplomat in Monrovia, once commented on an invitation from Minister Dennis to the diplomatic corp to view a movie on white minority rule in Southern Africa. Walker noted the irony of promoting the movie without seeing the implications for "Black minority rule" in Liberia. Records of the PRC military government's tribunal has former Foreign Minister Dennis attempting to exonerate himself from charges of "rampant corruption" and the other such charges by declaring that



these could not be applicable to him, as he was almost always out of the country. The extra-judicial trials and the brutal executions notwithstanding, Dennis must have appreciated the nexus between foreign and domestic policies. In lighter moments, Cecil Dennis once remarked to me: “Dunn, we would all be communists,” as he alluded to the prospects of a MOJA (Movement for Justice in Africa social movement) or PAL (Progressive Alliance of Liberia social movement) government.

During my frequent travels with Dennis, much work was accomplished, and I had an opportunity to consider many important international issues and to observe global actors. I was also able to see the more human side of international politics. Working on behalf of Dennis and the Liberian government, I drafted speeches and read conference documents to ensure they were broadly compatible with existing policy. In Colombo, Sri Lanka, in 1976, the Liberian delegation was approached by US Embassy officials requesting that we enter reservations on parts of the conference document that were critical of US-Cuba policy. We accommodated our American friends. Sitting behind Dennis during debates, I would occasionally pass him notes with an idea suggesting his intervention in the debate. My French language competency was always an asset to the Liberian delegation. Even my wedding ring came in handy, as in Lusaka we visited Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda, who had been promised a special ring by President Tolbert. As we talked about taking the size of Kaunda’s finger, Kaunda looked in my direction, saw my ring and said, “Let me try that.” He did and it fitted, which led him to say, “there you have it, gentlemen!” I was elated. Some highlights of my working time with Minister Dennis included taking notes, as Dennis met with US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, and travelling with Dennis to West Germany on the invitation of his German counterpart, Hans Dietrich Gencher. This included even a secret meeting at the offices of the Liberian Mission to the UN with Israeli Foreign Minister Yigal Allon, at the latter’s instance, to explore restoring relations with Liberia. The initiative was not fruitful, because Dennis towed the official line that as the decision to sever relations was a collective African one, restoring those relations would have to also be a collective African decision.

I was attending, with Minister Dennis in Lusaka, a meeting of the OAU Liberation Committee in February 1977. We were in the company of the Ethiopian Foreign Minister Kifle Wodejo, when the latter received word that his military Head of State, General Tafari Bente, had been shot dead by his colleague, Menghistu Haile Mariam. Menghistu became the new head of state. Kifle understood that he could not return home. Given his friendship with Dennis, he travelled to Liberia with us, and, from Monrovia, arranged for himself an American exile.

Succeeding Kifle as Foreign Minister was Dr. Feleke Gedie Giorgis, who soon began to represent a hard-line socialist Ethiopia. There were such widespread purges and human rights violations that Addis appeared less a welcoming city for the OAU. One soon began hearing rumors about possibly relocating the seat of the organization. Dennis quietly put out feelers among some of his colleague foreign ministers about Monrovia as a viable alternative to Addis. This move so infuriated Giorgis that it led to tension in Ethiopian-Libarian relations, though the depths of the tension did not become known until the Liberian coup of April 1980.

As the Liberian military leader, Samuel Doe, toyed with what was called the socialist option, Foreign Minister Matthews visited Addis and was given a “revolutionary” welcome by his counterpart, Dr. Giorgis. The point was made that what had happened in Liberia was similar to what took place in Ethiopia in 1974, when a similarly entrenched archaic regime was replaced by a grass-roots leadership emanating from a popular uprising dedicated to the creation of “a new social order” of equity and justice. Though all of this revolutionary bombast was short-lived, at least for Liberia, Giorgis felt he got his revenge for Dennis’ audacious indiscretion.

I was with Minister Dennis as he met with US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in New York in September 1975. Though I was still special assistant, I was not in the meeting with Kissinger, when the latter visited Liberia in April 1976. This controversial visit took place April 30 – May 1, 1976. It was controversial because Africa was up in arms against the American secretary of state because of his government’s policy of “constructive engagement” with the apartheid regime of South Africa, a policy that was severely criticized across the continent, even leading Ghana to snub Kissinger by cancelling his trip to Accra. Nonetheless, Kissinger was given the red-carpet treatment in Liberia. After a session with President Tolbert at the Executive Mansion, Kissinger’s star-studded motorcade made its way to the Foreign Ministry on Ashmun Street. I watched the show from my office window, as the American secret service performed acrobatics for the gullible Liberian crowd, leaping off their moving vehicles to be beside the secretary, as his limousine came to rest at the diplomatic entry of the Ministry. As Dennis himself told me later, while Kissinger was being shown photographs in the parlors of the Ministry, Dennis pointed to one of his predecessors, the photograph of the late Secretary of State Gabriel L. Dennis. To which Kissinger let out a barb: “Looks like a family affair!” Tolbert held a state dinner for Kissinger. It was all form, devoid of substance. The US was skeptical of Tolbert’s strong pro-African liberation stance, as I would learn decades later as I read declassified accounts in the American national archives.



Under President Tubman, Liberia had played a leading role in African liberation and in establishing the bases for cooperation among the states of the continent. Though Tubman's stance stemmed from his own sense of the need for African solidarity, the Liberian position was also cast in the context of the Cold War. Here was a pro-American Tubman, when it came to the broad issues of war and peace, also playing a leading role on decolonization and organizing African unity.

President Tolbert endeavored to continue some of these policies but also to add new dimensions. Upon acceding to the presidency, therefore, he began to review inherited policies and making adjustments deemed necessary. For example, America's Firestone investment underwent a significant review that pleased neither Firestone nor the American government. Tolbert also determined that it was necessary to deepen ties with neighboring states, notably with Sékou Touré's Guinea. A year following Tubman's death, Tolbert was in Conakry serving as a pallbearer at the funeral of Kwame Nkrumah, former President of Ghana and a Tubman nemesis. Liberia was rewarded with membership in the Liberation Committee of the OAU, a unit once considered a preserve of progressive frontline states in reference to their proximity to the White Redoubt of Southern Africa. In furtherance of the progressive Africa policy, there was also the Liberian defense pact with Guinea of 1976. It seems at the least that Tolbert's Africa and Third World policies, coupled with tensions with Firestone, contributed in important ways to the estrangement with the US.

I shared the strong pro-Africa and developing countries solidarity policies, though I wanted to see this tied to more inclusive governance at home. Calls at the nonaligned forums and at the UN for a new international economic order and a new international information order were all compatible with my views. I also saw wisdom in Tolbert's general foreign policy thrust of cultivating ties with new friends (such as the USSR, China, Romania, and Cuba), while retaining traditional relations with the West. I felt that it was this mission that we were in pursuit of as I travelled the world with Minister Dennis.

As I have already stated, I was troubled by the disconnect between Liberia's progressive foreign policy and a somewhat regressive domestic reality. The heart of my March 5, 1976 memo was that the Foreign Ministry under Dennis' stewardship had a strong presence abroad in terms of diplomatic representation but weak engagement with the home office, and the essential connection between foreign and domestic policies left much to be desired. As can be seen by two articles of March 16, 1980, in the *Sunday Nation* of Tanzania, my memo was prescient. The first article, "Troubled Liberia now putting emphasis on rural development," was based on the interview of the article's writer with Cecil Dennis. Addressing the "rice issue" that underlay the April 1979

defiance of government, Dennis lauded the government's rural development effort. The second article in the same paper is entitled "Tolbert vows to crush Leftist groups." It detailed how Tolbert lost the power struggle momentarily to the old guards who, in the wake of the newly registered People's Progressive Party's (PPP) call for Tolbert's resignation, began the finger pointing, "I told you so!" What was at play here was a repudiation of Tolbert's progressive stance by Liberian conservative forces. As a result, the President, feeling under siege, reversed his previous liberalizing course of action and now began to hew to a hardline.

Rural development in Liberia at this time was a euphemism for developing the old hinterland. There were consequences in this instance as there were when President Tubman created new counties out of the hinterland regions in 1964. The issue of inclusive governance was instantly raised. Tolbert's "rural development and urban reconstruction" would also carry consequences. So, Tolbert viewed his engagements with the opposition social movements (MOJA and PAL, notably) as a means of furthering his policies. The TWP hegemony was not sanguine, as they strove to undercut Tolbert's efforts when they could. The "rice issue" (more fully discussed later) was more than disagreement over an increase in the price of the national staple. It was profoundly a struggle for political "rights" much more than merely the immediate livelihood issue of "rice."

My memo to Minister Dennis had three things in mind, though they may not have been clearly articulated. The first was the need for structural reorganization so that there would be better information flow in the interest of message consistency. The second was a recommendation that the voices of senior officials and subordinates be heard, eschewing the tendency of having the Ministry run exclusively from the Office of the Minister and his special assistant. The final thing that my memo sought to convey was the disjunction or contradiction between a progressive foreign policy and a moderate to conservative domestic policy. While the Foreign Ministry was supporting liberation movements and leaders throughout Africa, at home the regime was on less than firm footing, when it came to the issue of inclusive governance. The forces of change struggled with those of the status quo with no evident societal umpire.

The memo was a follow-up to a chat Minister Dennis and I had had on the plane enroute home from the 26<sup>th</sup> OAU ministerial conference in 1976. I reminded the Minister that, as I had said to him then, I was of the firm belief that he had all of the ingredients to ensure a most successful and outstanding tour of duty as Foreign Minister. "With the strengthening of the administration of the Ministry as well as the foreign service or our diplomatic missions

abroad we would be taking a giant step forward in our ongoing efforts to make Liberia's foreign affairs establishment one of the most efficient and effective."

My implied criticism was that Dennis should consider moving away from a one-man show toward enhanced collaboration. Clashes with Assistant Minister Charles Ansumana Cooper of the African and Asian Bureau were frequent until the President, through the instrumentalities of former First Lady Cooper's mother, Mrs. Janet King, had Cooper posted as our Ambassador to Japan. The Ministry's lawyer, Counselor John Togba resigned. Deputy Minister T. Siafa Sherman played a checkmating role, given his special familial ties to First Lady Victoria Tolbert, a fact Dennis knew too well. Even so, Sherman has, years later, shared with me instances that confirm a non-collaborative Foreign Minister. These and other officials bear testimony to and confirm some of the concerns raised in my memo.

My memo underscored the importance of inspiring interest and dedication in the staff. One way of doing this, I suggested, was calling periodic staff meetings, and causing all to feel that their leader cares and appreciates their services. It is important, I wrote, to make it clear to the staff what the Foreign Ministry is all about and how its activities fit into the overall program of the administration, demonstrating how important each and every member is in the accomplishment of the Ministry's objectives. I expressed the view that this would go a long way in removing the attitude of indifference that was characteristic of some members of the staff at that time.

With reference to the senior staff, I noted the consultation, based on a need for routine information, and thought it might be more comprehensive. Something I considered missing was perhaps an effective inter-staff communication: briefing one another about certain developments in our various offices in order to ensure that what we write or speak would be consistent with positions taken in other areas. As a result, foreign policy would be viewed as a "whole" and our various undertakings were to be geared toward a furthering of the "whole." The memo reminded the Minister about an earlier memo suggesting the "setting up of a Policy Advisory Committee as a permanent Unit of the Ministry." I added specific suggestions about reforming the organization of the Minister's office, as well as that of the Central Office (which I had been a part of back in 1965).

I was witness to a July 4, 1975 event at the American Embassy in Monrovia at which Minister Dennis spoke extemporaneously about a less than satisfactory relationship between Liberia and the United States. Though I was present at the event in my capacity as Special Assistant to the Minister, we had had no prior discussion about what the thrust of his remarks would be. Dennis told his audience of diplomats and government officials that the Liberian people

celebrated the American occasion “with mixed feelings,” for, in spite of the much-vaunted special relationship, “the attitude of the United States toward Liberia had been somewhat ambivalent.” He went on to express the hope for “a more reassuring relationship” as the United States stood on the verge of celebrating its Bicentennial.

This was a bombshell that escalated tension in US/Liberia relations. US Ambassador Melvin Manful reacted “rather sharply,” expressing displeasure and then asked to see Dennis in his (Dennis’) office. When in the Minister’s office, they shouted at each other, using foul language. Dennis reported the details to Tolbert. Manful asked for an audience with Tolbert. Tolbert expressed disapproval of the ambassador’s behavior, considering the ambassador’s use of profanities in the Office of the Minister as insulting to the Liberian government and people. Manful apologized and offered a handshake to Dennis. The relationship stood in need of serious repair, for there was cordiality only on the surface.

Because Tolbert came to office as a result of Tubman’s death, he did not face an election until 1975. In that election he ran as the standard bearer of the hegemonic True Whig Party. Once in power, Tolbert engineered a constitutional change that returned Liberia to a single eight-year term for the presidency. Tolbert was not the first president to change the presidential terms of office. After his first eight-year term in 1952, Tubman had the constitution amended to allow for an indefinite number of four-year terms. After his second term in 1936, Edwin Barclay also effected a constitutional change that limited the presidential tenure to a single eight-year term, which for him ended in 1944, when Tubman was inaugurated president. After being elected president in 1975, Tolbert was inaugurated in January 1976, for his single eight-year term. With the change, Tolbert’s time as president would have ended in January 1984, had he not been overthrown.

I skipped my first ever opportunity to cast a vote in my country during the True Whig Party-led election in 1975. Before leaving home for study abroad in 1965, I was qualified by age to vote but could not, because I did not meet the property requirement. On Election Day in 1975, I left my Paynesville home and drove toward the voting booth at the YMCA building on Broad Street in the Crown Hill area. As I approached the polling site, I did not stop but continued driving the length of Broad Street up to the Ducor Hotel, where I turned around, drove past the YMCA again, and returned to my home. I have no explanation for my action other than that I saw no meaning in the exercise, where there was a single political party and a single candidate. There followed a similar election in 1977 for vice president due to the death of Vice President James Edward Greene. Though I had made a televised address urging voters to go to

the polls, I ignored the event and did not vote. It was only years later in 2017 that, at age 75, I was casting my very first ballot ever in my country. This was the first round of the elections that year. I was not in the country for the runoff election between George Weah of the Congress for Democratic Change and Joseph Boakai of the Unity Party.

Although President Tolbert reorganized his government in the aftermath of the 1975 election, C. Cecil Dennis remained as Foreign Minister. After the election Dennis made a number of recommendations for the staff of the Ministry and our diplomatic missions abroad. At this point my memo of March 5, 1976, soon came into play, as did prior discussions I held with the Minister. He had in his mind clear ideas about personnel changes but initially held them close to his chest, as my recent research revealed. I located a letter with the Minister's signature, in which he was recommending me to the President for the post of Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs. Dated March 16, 1977, the pertinent part reads: "For the position of Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs for Administration, I wish to recommend Dr. D. Elwood Dunn, Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs, who currently serves as my Special Assistant. Commissioned by you in 1974 as Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs and Director of the Foreign Service Institute, Dr. Dunn served with credit until his assignment as Special Assistant. In the latter capacity he had developed a broader perspective not only on the operation of the Ministry but as well of the many matters of international policy to which this Ministry must relate." Though signed by Minister Dennis, the letter was never sent to the President. Political maneuvers may have been underway. What I was offered was another lateral move from one assistant minister post to another – this one to African and Asian Affairs where, according to the Minister, I would have wider responsibilities, often travelling alone to OAU-related meetings.

I was not happy. I feared Dennis would force the issue by making a formal recommendation to the President. In a letter to a confidant, I expressed my displeasure saying, "I like to feel free, respected, appreciated and rewarded for what I do ... I frankly feel humiliated, and were we in a different kind of society I would have long since changed jobs. Accepting the post of Assistant Minister for African Affairs would mean continuing use of me as a workhorse just because it is convenient to do so today." I now wanted out of the Ministry. I believe my memos and conversations about changes in the running of the Ministry now left Minister Dennis uncomfortable about my proximity as his special assistant. The Minister probably preferred a special assistant without a mind conscious of the social vibrations in the wider society, within which we all then functioned.

My desire to leave the Foreign Ministry now led me to begin thinking of options. One option would be to teach at the University of Liberia, where J. Bernard Blamo was now president. This was unlike Advertus Hoff in 1973–74, when my joining the university was an option I did not want to take. My reason for refusing this option was that Hoff was attempting to run the university like a faith-based institution of old, a leadership style that generated social unrest on campus. The issue had now become political. One must be careful in making promises and offers that are not genuine.

I took the bull by the horns, wrote a letter to Tolbert, and delivered it in person to Minister of State Townsend, who assured me that it would be handled in confidence. I believe it was. In the letter dated September 26, 1977, I recalled my correspondence with the President, while still at Seton Hall University in 1973. At that time, I saw myself alternating between government and academia. Although I did not say it to Tolbert, one of the precise reasons why I sought and pursued the doctoral degree was so that I would have a fallback position. Instead, I told the President that circumstances were now impelling me to request a transfer to what I called “our national university,” the University of Liberia.

I had yet to hear back from the President when I was called upon (do not remember the source, though it could have been Townsend) to make a broadcast statement on national television regarding the special election to “elect” Bishop Bennie D. Warner, then head of the United Methodist Church as vice president of Liberia. Former Vice President James E. Greene had died, and, between the ruling TWP and President Tolbert, Warner had been chosen as his replacement. I did not realize it at the time, but selecting me to speak was perhaps a test, as my letter to the President is dated Sept. 26, 1977. I spoke on Sept 28<sup>th</sup>.

A line in my televised statement on the Warner election went like this: “On October 4, 1977, all adult Liberians are expected to go to the polls to endorse by the act of voting, the candidate of the TWP for the office of Vice President of Liberia.” I ended the statement by exhorting my viewers “to make a massive turn-out for progress; make a massive turn-out for stability; make a massive turn-out for justice. I appeal to you to make a massive turn-out for a re-affirmation of faith in the unassailable ideals which form the very bedrock of the Republic of Liberia.” President Tolbert sent me a letter of commendation dated Sept. 30, 1977, in which he wrote: “I commend you for what I consider a brilliant statement and which I think was well received by the Public.”

What all of this says to me is that the President had seen my letter before I spoke, and he sent me the commendation without referencing my



confidential letter to him. Perhaps he, and others, was looking me over. At any rate, I had carried out the partisan request to speak for two reasons: I knew well the character of the man Bennie Warner, having in my college days interacted with him through the National Student Christian Council, and I did not consider untoward the little politicking in the context of the times. United States Ambassador W. Beverly Carter expressed to me, in Minister Dennis' presence, the view that, in my TV statement, I had done much more than simply tow a party line.

In early September 1977, before Minister Dennis and delegation, which included me, left for the 1977 meeting of the UN General Assembly in New York, Tolbert summoned Dennis and me to his Bentol home. I rode with the Minister. The meeting was billed as an opportunity to receive last instructions from the President before we took off to represent Liberia. The President gave no direct indication that he had received my letter, though he told me that he wanted me to remain at the Foreign Ministry for the time being. That was a clear give-away or indication of his having read my letter. Dennis did not comment. When we were done with the official business, we took leave of the President. There was momentary unease as I also rode with Dennis back to Monrovia, but the tension soon dissipated. We took off the following day for New York. Whether Dennis knew what was happening and felt it suited his purpose in terms of what he desired at his Foreign Ministry, I will now never know. On the plane to New York, Dennis was his jovial self, often calling me up to his first-class seat to talk about one thing or another. That this was his habit was clear to me as I recall once sitting between him and the French-speaking Foreign Minister of Mauritania interpreting for hours. My study in France was coming in handy.

Everything was routine as we landed and got settled, he at his hotel and me at mine. As we pursued the business of government, word reached Dennis first through his spouse, Professor Agnes Cooper Dennis of the University of Liberia, that, as she put it, he was losing his special assistant to the Executive Mansion, where I was to become Deputy Minister of State for Presidential Affairs and Director of the Cabinet. It was Dennis who first broke the news to me, in the process saying to me: "Dunn, you're a good man!" Tolbert himself would say as much several months into my time at the Mansion, once wondering in Townsend's presence why there was the hiccup in my relationship with Dennis.

Once Minister Dennis had delivered his traditional speech during the general debate at the General Assembly, he took off for a previously arranged medical checkup with doctors in the Washington, D.C. area. Before he departed, we prepared letters for the President and officials of the Foreign Ministry, which

he signed and left with me in New York. He also asked for extension of stay for me and his secretary, Edwin Boima Fahnbulleh, to enable us carry out some mopping up activities before we would leave for home. On the appointed date, I flew back home from New York.



## Government Service

*Executive Mansion, 1977–1980*

No sooner had I returned home than I received formal notice, probably from Presidential Affairs Minister of State E. Reginald Townsend, about my transfer to the Mansion as Deputy Minister and Director of the Cabinet, succeeding Saba Kla-Williams, who had served in that capacity since 1976, though he had joined the Mansion staff in 1972. Other senior staff in the Office of the President included Minister of State Without Portfolio Charles Clarke, Deputy Minister Wesseh McClain, Legal Counsel Richard Diggs, Assistant Minister David Chieh, Private Secretary Julius Kromah, Press Secretary Henry Cole and his deputy Willie Givens, French Interpreter Albert Juste, and Director of Finance Beverly Thompson Gray.

Without fanfare or words of thanks from any official of the Foreign Ministry, I left my office after delivering letters from New York and collecting my personal effects. I encouraged my secretary and confidant, Francis Passawe and messenger Josiah Gray to join me at the Mansion. My uneventful departure was in sharp contrast to my arrival three years earlier. Only Press and Information Director Philip Kiadii protested quietly that I would leave the Ministry so unceremoniously.

Now I was embarked on the second leg of my government service. The 1977 year of my arrival was the year, during which the regime's critic and Grand Gedeh County Senator Chea Cheapo was expelled from the Senate, Vice President James Greene died and was replaced by Bishop Bennie Warner, and Angie Brooks Randall and Frederick Tulay were made associate justices of the Supreme Court. Liberia established diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China, and Florence Chenoweth was appointed Minister of Agriculture. This was also the year that Tolbert proposed to the legislature the deletion of December 1 as Matilda Newport Day from the Patriotic Observance Law. This was in furtherance, he argued, of national unification and integration, and the excising of what he called sectionalist, divisive, and discriminatory features from patriotic observances. He significantly quoted the American Thomas Jefferson that "... law and institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind as that becomes more developed, more enlightened, as new discoveries are made, new truths discovered and manners and

opinions change; with the change of circumstances, institutions must advance also to keep pace with the times.”

I was coming to the Office of the President of Liberia, aware of some of the challenges and opportunities. Tolbert had succeeded to the presidency after serving almost two decades as vice president to the late President William V.S. Tubman. Given Tubman's dominance of the Liberian socio-political scene for almost three decades before his death, Tolbert's challenges were huge. They included de-Tubmanizing and establishing that he was now his own man prepared to articulate and lead a progressive agenda. I had read that much even before returning home from graduate school to join the government in 1974. A major challenge was the need to bring balance to the perennial imbalance between the widely perceived two Liberia's, one the Liberia of descendants of Black emigrants and the other the Liberia of indigenous peoples. Other challenges included the impact of African independence on Liberian society (Liberia no longer the sole African republic), the implications for the historic relations between Liberia and the United States, the challenge of emerging social movements highly critical of the social order, as well as the challenge of Africanizing the Republic of Liberia. This to my mind meant moving away from perceiving Liberia as a “little America” in Africa toward the notion of Liberia as an African nationality.

There were as well the opportunities to strive to build a better Liberia for *all*, taking into account both the tangible and intangible dimensions of rural development and urban reconstruction, and evolving a new social order that marginalized no Liberian regardless of the circumstances of his or her birth, as well as entertaining the notion of “Affirmative Action” in order to redress critical social imbalances.

We were also in the post-Steve Tolbert period. Stephen A. Tolbert, a business tycoon and Finance Minister in his older brother's government, exercised such power and influence that some referred to him as the “prime minister,” though Liberia had no such title. He was dynamic, efficient, and ruthless, with a knack for offending. When Firestone Plantations Company objected, during negotiations for renewing the agreement with the government, he reportedly defied the American company. When challenged about conflict-of-interest issues such as expansion of his Mesurado Group of Companies while also Finance Minister, he doubled down using his powerful presence in society. The private secretary to the President, David Chieh, writes of an incident where the President had asked his Finance Minister brother to facilitate the travel of his secretary to join the President on a foreign trip. In the presence of a crowd, Minister Tolbert addressed Chieh with an “air of scorn”: “The President has instructed me to send your ass to Nigeria. Come to my office for a ticket

to take the Pan Am flight to Lagos.” By his actions, he alienated himself from a good segment of the Liberian people, and some external partners as well, notably Firestone. Yet he exercised considerable influence over his presidential brother. His departure from the scene in 1975 left a vacuum, which came to be filled by other personalities. They were not like Steve, but exercised influence on the President in other ways. Among these men were E. Jonathan Goodridge and McKinley A. DeShield. Before he died in 1976, Goodridge was Minister of Local Government, the portfolio that traditionally handled the affairs of rural Liberia. The assumption was that Goodridge exercised subtle influence in the old hinterland or rural Liberia, and stood ready to serve the President’s interest should the need arise.

As to DeShield, who would die in 1978, he was the President’s friend and confidant of long duration. He was also a perennial Postmaster General or Minister of Postal Affairs and secretary general of the ruling TWP. It is widely reported in some circles that when President Tubman died in London in 1971, DeShield was the first official in Liberia to know, and he informed then Vice President Tolbert before Tubman’s Secretary of State J. Rudolph Grimes notified him. Tubman had left Grimes in charge of the government (Chairman of the Cabinet) when he left for his fateful health trip. With the passing of Goodridge and DeShield, not too many who could challenge President Tolbert’s perception of things were left in the executive government.

The year 1977 was also a time of growing political criticism, including criticism of the President and his associates. In 1977, the illegal transshipment of amphetamines to neighboring African countries through Liberia became public knowledge. The scandal had echoes of corruption in high places, including the Executive Mansion I was now joining. A citizen of Lofa County, Frederick Korvah, sent an open letter to the President naming high government officials, some of them legislators who were importers of the “dangerous drug – amphetamine” from Bulgaria and then transshipping it. Korvah called on the President to take action. In addition to Korvah’s criticism, opposition groups, MOJA and PAL, were ever active, flexing their political muscles. Pamphleteer Albert Porte continued his constitutional democracy crusade.

MOJA was a social movement engaged in advocacy for social and political rights for the masses. Among its leaders were Togba Nah Tipoteh, an economist, Amos Sawyer and H. Boima Fahnbulleh, professors at the University of Liberia, and Dew Mayson, a former official of the Foreign Ministry and former instructor at Cuttington University College. While Tipoteh and Fahnbulleh were of indigenous parentage, Sawyer and Mason were not. Something of significance had brought these young Liberians and their many youthful followers together: a passion for equality and justice in their country – MOJA was

making waves in the society as it recruited a burgeoning number of young students. PAL or the Progressive Alliance of Liberia was also a social movement that was created by young Liberians in the US. It transferred to the home base and quickly engaged in intense political activities that led it to transitioning to a political party, the Progressive People's Party (PPP), early in 1980. Gabriel Bacchus Matthews was its most prominent, though not the only leader.

Here too, we had a young Liberian whose pedigree defied the conventional wisdom's understanding of Liberia: born in Monrovia in 1948, his mother was Rebecca Greene of the Greene family of Sinoe County, though Rebecca's mother was ethnic Bassa from Rivercess. His father was Jehu Bacchus Matthews whose mother from an earlier marriage was Georgia Payne Cooper, daughter of James Spriggs Payne, Liberia's fourth and eighth president (1868–70 & 1876–78). Madame Cooper was a long-time secretary of the Liberian Senate. At one point in time Matthews, Sr. was Chief Clerk of the House of Representatives while his mother was Secretary of the Senate. What is more is that due to the early death of the senior Matthews, family members had to chip in to take care of young Bacchus, and in this way then Secretary of State Gabriel L. Dennis (1944–54) contributed and the name Gabriel was given to the young man. Bacchus' daughter Magdalene Matthews writes in her book: *It's A She: A Tale of Life, Loss And Love*: "Dad recalled how he would spend holidays at both grandmothers' homes, leaving very troubled by the stark contrast [opulence and poverty] – a memory that would stick with him for life."

Albert Porte, a descendant of immigrants from the West Indies, was an institution unto himself. He was a pamphleteer and constitutionalist who had engaged and challenged Liberian governments since the administration of President C.D.B. King (1920–30). He advocated for constitutional democracy in a country that had democratic form with a veneer of patronage and a hegemonic culture. It was at once a republic and an oligarchy.

What became clear to me upon my arrival at the Mansion was a brewing tension between the old establishment figures in the government and the President, with a good number of the technocratic class in government exercising mental reservations and largely observing the clash between the old Liberia and a projected new Liberia. Those of a new orientation remained disparate, unfocused, with representation both within and outside government. The new Liberia that was struggling to be born was not of one accord as to ideology and modus operandi. Some were radical and wanted revolutionary change, some were moderate and wanted evolutionary change, yet others were quiet change agents advocating for a blending of the two approaches. Tolbert saw himself as a change agent but did not articulate a clear strategy let alone the requisite tactics for leading change. I sensed these tensions, ambiguities,

and contradictions at the outset of my tenure at the Executive Mansion. I would see them play out in real life situations over the next few years.

President Tolbert was not a political operative. He did not seem to know what to do with at least three key figures in the regime: Chief Justice James A.A. Pierre, Senator Frank E. Tolbert, his elder brother, and Speaker Richard A. Henries. These were all men of my father's generation who were honorable and well-meaning people but steeped in the ways and the inequities of the past. They were alarmed that Tolbert had distanced himself so far from the Tubman ethos of governance and the myths associated therewith: the myth that society rested on four pillars that included the Church, the State, the TWP, and the Masonic Craft. Two formulations of this perspective should suffice to make the point. The first was a statement made by Justice Pierre in 1978 at a special meeting of the Cabinet with the justices of the Supreme Court. Pierre said "The pioneers brought the Bible in 1821. Twenty-Five years later they brought the Constitution. The Bible and the Constitution remain the bases of our national action for the past 131 years. The Preacher with the Bible and the Lawyer with the Constitution have been responsible for the stability of Liberia." The second formulation of the myth came as Counselor J.J. Chesson met with Tolbert, administration officials and PAL leader Bacchus Matthews on April 21, 1979. In prefatory remarks, Chesson reminded the gathering that he was a former Chief of Security of the country, former attorney general, and Past Grand Master of the UBF (United Brothers of Friendship), and a Master Mason. To this, President Tolbert commented that Masonry should be left out of the matter at hand because fraternal affiliation does not control his actions as President, but in the execution of his duties, the interest of Liberia is paramount to him, and he adheres to the laws and the Constitution of the Land.

Not only did the three men resist change, they were intolerant of public criticism of the status quo and unwilling to acknowledge the legitimacy of popular demands for change. One example is the way Senator Tolbert reacted to the Brownell Commission Report that offered a frank and critical assessment of the government's policies and actions both before and after the April 14, 1979 civil disobedience, dubbed "rice riots." (I will address the events and the commission report later). Senator Tolbert accosted me at the Mansion one Saturday morning in late 1979 and told me that I should be ashamed of myself for having signed the Brownell Commission Report, adding that he blames his brother for appointing Counselor Nete Sie Brownell, previously convicted of treason against the state, to head the commission (alluding to President Tubman's persecution and prosecution in 1955 of his political opponents). Another example was when President Tolbert sent me to take something to Justice Pierre's house. When I rang the doorbell, and the door was opened, I found the Chief

Justice and Speaker Henries in a tête-à-tête. The Speaker soon took leave, and Justice Pierre took the occasion to advise me, “as a young man from Grand Bassa County like myself.” I would later find in a dispatch from the US Embassy in Monrovia to the US State Department that Justice Pierre had stated when visiting the Embassy, at his request in late 1979, that Liberia was on firmer grounds when Tubman was president. The final example was when Speaker Henries and I were at a late-night meeting at the Executive Mansion in early March 1980 during which he railed to me against the President, lamenting that the President would ‘run this country into the ground.’ Yet, when shortly thereafter he had occasion to speak to Tolbert on the phone, all I heard from the Speaker as I stood there was: “alright Mr. President, okay Mr. President.”

These three men were among the pillars of the old political establishment who still had political muscle to flex. The President had not built for himself a clear and focused following of people like Senators Jackson Doe and Augustus Caine, Ministers Edward Kesselly, Bernard Blamo, Gabriel Tucker, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Cletus Wortorson, and Samuel Hill, including some younger people. Tolbert had first thought of Jackson Doe for the post of vice president following the death of Vice President James Greene. In fact, Doe had come to Tolbert’s attention early in 1971. US Ambassador Samuel Westerfield reported to the US State Department in May of that year that Vice President Tolbert was “impressed by eloquence of Jackson Doe, Representative from Nimba, who nominated the vice president at this year’s TWP Convention, that he looked him over carefully, and now views this little known Liberian of tribal origin as possibly more attractive deputy [vice president].” In spite of this and other experiences with Doe, Tolbert apparently gave in to his conservative colleagues and chose Bennie Warner. President Tolbert told Minister Hill that he would “make of thee a mountain,” but there was no action. Tolbert invited critical minds into his Cabinet, but they did not come together to focus on a deliberate change agenda. The President, on his part, never saw the value in such an initiative, though he spoke vaguely of it. In the absence of such a political base, he was practicing the politics of pronouncement or governance by declaration, declarations that were hardly heeded because of the absence of a clear mechanism for policy implementation.

Having served a year at the old State Department in 1965 and three years at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I felt generally familiar with routine government bureaucracy. But I had never worked so close to the President of Liberia. I therefore approached the job cautiously as it was my inclination to approach most new experiences. My first challenge was of a protocol nature. As I walked into the Mansion to start work, I learned that my maternal grandmother, the woman who was my all-in-all from my birth to adolescence, lay dying in Grand



Bassa County. Vice President-elect Warner's installation was imminent, and I was put in charge of the team meeting his guests at Roberts International Airport. I drove to Buchanan the evening before thinking I would see my grandmother draw her last breath, and return that night to be on hand to go to the airport the next day. I did not want to start a new job with an excuse about not being able to carry out my first assignment. As it turned out I only saw her dying. She died the following afternoon while I was in Monrovia. My spirit was low as I struggled to digest my grandmother's passing while starting a new job. But I was comforted knowing that she had gone to be with the Jesus she spoke so passionately of as we grew up under her loving guidance.

Soon I was in the swing of things at Tolbert's Executive Mansion. Minister Townsend was my immediate boss and proved to be an excellent mentor. He was smart, a world-class editor, and always approachable. At age 35, I considered both Townsend and the President as father figures, more a part of my father's generation. They were both hardworking and fully absorbed in what they were doing. I had for long considered hard work as part of my own DNA. My children would often quote me in later years as saying that "I lived to work; I did not work to live." I took this work ethic with me to Cecil Dennis' Foreign Ministry; I brought it with me to the Mansion. I tried not to defer to tomorrow what I could do today, even often taking work home with me, which I then tried to complete before going to bed.

The day finally arrived for my very first Cabinet meeting in my capacity as Director of the Cabinet. My hand-written notes that I kept with my personal papers for four decades are dated November 1, 1977, with the starting time as 1 p.m. Because this was also the first Cabinet meeting for the newly installed vice president, Tolbert began by welcoming Warner to the Cabinet and briefly noting my presence. Tolbert mentioned that President Tubman started the practice of including the vice president. He was continuing the practice not just for the sake of precedence but mainly because it afforded the vice president the opportunity to be a part of the decision-making process of governing, the better to equip him to articulate and explain national policies. The President went on to also explain the presence of the Speaker of the House of Representatives at Cabinet, indicating that it was a good thing to have the speaker, especially when budget matters were being decided, adding further that at times the relevant legislative committee was also invited. All of this was designed, the President explained, to obviate the need for protracted debate during legislative deliberations. The constitutional division of powers was blurred here as in many other instances of the regime extant.

The principal subject of the day was the importation into, and trans-shipment from Liberia of amphetamine and other dangerous drugs from Bulgaria

and associated serious abuse and corruption issues. This matter had already led the President to dismiss from government officials of the Finance Ministry and of the Executive Mansion. Those from Finance were dismissed because they illegally authorized the delivery of drugs to certain Liberian businessmen. Those fired from the Mansion were let go because they were not diligent in carrying out the President's directives to the Finance Minister not to release drugs to businessmen. A lengthy discussion soon ensued regarding the more than two dozen persons, some prominent names in society, involved in the affair. Some were reportedly engaged in legal trans-shipment of drugs to land-locked African countries for animal use; others were engaged in the sale of narcotic drugs on the Liberian market. This was seemingly big business that involved securing bank loans and mortgaging of properties.

When the President posed the question as to who should be punished in this sordid affair, the responses from his Cabinet were ambiguous. Some felt that there should be prosecution only where there was evidence. Others thought the matter should be closed for fear of public misunderstanding. Still others said that, where a law has been broken, there should be prosecution, even if a presidential pardon might come later. When the President asked specifically about punishment, the consensus was that there should be none. Cabinet officials reasoned that people had suffered considerable losses, because they had invested in drugs that were burnt or destroyed by the authorities. As to query about what to do with those dismissed for their complicity, the response was that the dismissals were deemed sufficient punishment. In the end, Tolbert added to the indecisiveness. Instead of making a final decision, the President instructed the Minister of Justice to come to him with any new evidence.

I was beginning to learn both how the Cabinet functioned and the ambiguity that attended the handling of certain matters of state. By 1978, I was settled in. I moved from the fourth floor office, inherited from my predecessor to the seventh floor, where the Cabinet room was located. I began to be called to sit in for Minister Townsend in his office adjacent to the President's, when the minister was away. Already it seems Townsend was experiencing disappointment, demoralized because he had been given reason to believe that he would have been chosen as vice president upon Greene's death. Several staff members of the Mansion intimated this to me, and Vice President Warner later acknowledged that Tolbert told him, when being interviewed for the job, that he was on a list of candidates that included Townsend and Jackson Doe.

Among the events of 1978 was a military pact with Guinea within the framework of a Pan-African Military Force under exclusive control of the OAU. Other important actions were John Feweh Sherman's appointment as Commerce Minister, Cletus Wortorson as Lands and Mines Minister, and Varney Dempster



as Director of National Police. Sherman held a master's degree in agriculture economics from the University of Pittsburgh and was also a Harvard-educated marketing expert from Cape Mount County. Wortorson was a geologist, who later became a presidential candidate (1997) and a senator. Dempster, also from Cape Mount, was the son of Roland Tombakai Dempster, a Liberian literary figure. All three gentlemen were of indigenous backgrounds.

The highlight for me in 1978 was a May 28<sup>th</sup> letter from Minister Townsend informing me that the President had appointed me chair of a special committee of deputy ministers to prepare a concise, yet complete, review of the efforts of his presidency against the then ensuing seventh anniversary on July 24, 1978, of his presidency. The product, to be printed in a booklet, would be entitled “(The Story of) Seven Years of Total Involvement and Fulfillment.” My job was to bring together a group of already busy 19 deputy ministers, requesting each to submit to me in a specified time their estimation of what their respective ministries had been able to achieve during the first seven years of the Tolbert administration. I convened a few meetings and then badgered each of them until I received submissions. My job was to design the overall project, edit the submissions, and draft an introduction and a conclusion.

By mid August, a full draft was ready, which the committee approved and submitted to the President on August 16, 1978. A cover letter bore the signature of all the deputy ministers. Deputy Finance Minister for Fiscal Affairs, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, signed for the absent senior Deputy Minister of Finance, Gerald Padmore. Committee members were Gerald Padmore (Finance), Samuel D. Greene (Planning & Economic Affairs), T. Siafa Sherman (Foreign Affairs), E. Sumo Jones (Commerce, Industry, & Transportation), Jenkins Baker (Agriculture), J. Robert Ellis (Health & Social Welfare), J. Oliver Duncan (Education), J. Too William Cassell (Local Government, Rural Development, & Urban Reconstruction), Alfred J. Kulah (Action for Development & Progress), Winston D. Richards (Public Works), Alfred B. Curtis (Defense), Joseph A. Dennis (Labor, Youth, & Sports), Robert C. Tubman (Justice), M.W. Goda Baker (Lands & Mines), Johnny McClain (Information), J. Henry Swarray (Postal Affairs), J. Wesseh McClain (Presidential Affairs), J. Rudolph Johnson (State Without Portfolio), and myself, D. Elwood Dunn (Presidential Affairs & Director of the Cabinet – Chairman).

Tolbert commended us, calling our draft document a “valuable record of the new and dynamically changing Liberia that has begun to evolve.” He then added: “the book will therefore be published.” He thought we had “pains-takingly and efficiently completed the task assigned” to us. Eventually the Ministry of Information was responsible for the final design and publication of the sixty-four-page booklet entitled *Seven Years of Total Involvement and*

*Fulfillment 1971–1978.* My brief conclusion was followed by the transcription of two extemporaneous speeches Tolbert delivered on the occasion marking the seventh anniversary of his accession to the presidency, the first at a special thanksgiving and intercessory Service at the Centennial Memorial Pavilion July 23, 1978, and the second at a reception at the Executive Mansion on the same day. Among the things he said on the latter occasion was this: "... Our situation needs to be improved and if you see me moving in the way that I am moving it's because I feel that I have limited time to serve you. When I get out, I want to be able to say that I have done my best and nothing else but my best. When I talk about limited time, I mean that by the grace of God, I have served you seven years today, and by His Will, I will be serving another five years and five months, You know one of the things that will satisfy me most after I have completed the time allotted to me by God and you, my people, will be to be able to stand up and say there are a number of people, there are a number of distinguished public servants, who are not only politicians but statesmen, whom you can elect to serve and continue building this great Liberia ... to be able to say not here is one, here are two, here are three, here are four, but here are at least nine people from whom you can select one to succeed me and continue this building process which will never be completed until time shall be no more. I thank you." This was in 1978.

## 1 The April 14 Crisis

Few could imagine that the year 1979 would portend such upheavals as to threaten the very survival of the True Whig Party regime of President Tolbert. The most dramatic event of the year was a violent protest against the rising cost of Liberia's most basic food: rice. I will only briefly attempt to contextualize the Liberian situation. The April 14 crisis did not happen in isolation. A number of factors converged that eventuated in the crisis. One such factor was the 1970s economic crisis that affected countries throughout the continent. The price of commodities such as iron ore and rubber dropped sharply. The result was a drop in tax revenue for the government and downward pressure on jobs and wages for people working in those sectors. This was coupled with a spike in world oil prices because of OPEC. As a result of these forces outside their control, African governments, including Liberia, workers, and consumers were caught in a vise. This was not a local problem alone. In addition, there was pressure on the food supply and prices. In Liberia, as in other African countries, rapid urbanization meant more mouths to feed. Also in Liberia, the expansion of rubber production over the decades meant less arable farmland

to grow on and fewer agricultural workers to produce food. Liberia joined governments all over Africa in dealing with this problem by purchasing imported food that they sold at subsidized prices to urban consumers. While this helped prevent urban discontent and unrest, it depressed internal agricultural prices, further reducing local agricultural production, since farmers had to compete with cheap imported food stuffs.

An accompanying factor to these developments was pressure on government budgets. So long as exported commodity prices from iron ore and rubber were high, government could manage. But the drop in commodity prices, the spike in oil prices, and the growing urban population brought things to a crisis. Governments often took on debt to cope. Clifford Flemister, a relatively recent immigrant from the United States and prominent member of MOJA, wrote a critical paper in the midst of the Liberian crisis entitled “The Billion Dollar Debt,” in which he made the case that Liberia’s external debt would be in excess of a billion dollars by the end of 1979. It was easy to borrow because large international banks were flush with cash deposited by oil producing countries and because lenders assumed governments would always be able to repay. Then came the rising expectations from urban dwellers and youth. In Liberia, Tolbert’s public policy stance of inclusion and opening the democracy space heightened expectations. Students became restless. Social movements emerged. Urban dwellers placed greater demands on government. The 1979 OAU conference in Monrovia placed additional pressure on Liberia’s budget.

Liberia’s OAU obligations and the hosting of the summit conference in 1979 meant additional outlay of resources. The government undertook expensive infrastructure building and improvements. Among the justifications were Liberia’s obligations given its critical role in the founding of the pan-African organization, as well as the prospects of enhancing the tourist industry using the facilities following the conference. When the economy was good, countries could tolerate this level of spending. But when the economy contracted, there was less money to go around. Yet from the foregoing flowed insidious problems associated with patronage, corruption in high and low places, conflicts of interest, and nepotism.

The factors outlined above were understood and discussed within the councils of the state. They were captured in two reports, one a government commissioned private-sector review of the economy, and the other a Cabinet-committee review of the private-sector report. P. Clarence Parker, a businessman, chaired the “Report of the Private Sector Commission on Improving Investment Possibilities in Liberia.” Its leading message included the observation that Liberia’s investment potential could be advanced by a general cleansing of the investment climate, a reorientation of the investment sector, and

changing the emphasis of tax policy from revenue collection to development stimulation. For a more balanced transformation of rural Liberia, the commission called for the replacement of the hut tax with a lower development tax, and the allocation of its proceeds to development in rural communities.

Elements in the government were unhappy with the major findings of the private-sector review. They influenced Tolbert to establish a Cabinet-review committee, which was chaired by Minister of State Reginald Townsend. The committee in its submission shifted Liberia's economic problems primarily to external factors, adding, "On the fundamental issue of policy," the committee's belief "that more time and thought will be needed to study the long-term effects of the Commission's proposals." The government had done a sensible thing in establishing a credible private sector review of the economy with a view to acquiring an independent assessment to assist decision-making. But a culture adverse to ideas outside government led to the constitution of a review panel of Cabinet officers. The result, at least in the short run, was inertia.

The abovementioned developments placed the government in a difficult position. Public discussions of these issues took place in a contentious atmosphere. There were disagreements between government and opposition elements. There were also disagreements within the government. President Tolbert tried to deal with the situation by encouraging more dialogue, as he endured pressures from both the left and the right of the political spectrum. He also tried to deal with the food and budget problem by cutting imports in order to increase local production. This became the conundrum of the rice crisis.

To be sure, signs of political tension threatening social stability were discernable, going back to the earlier years of the 1970s, as various voices of dissent grew increasingly louder. The constitutionalist and pamphleteer Albert Porte continued his decades long work of attempting to hold the political leadership to the letter and spirit of the Constitution and, in so doing, clashed with the President's powerful brother, Finance Minister Stephen Tolbert, whom Porte accused of massive conflict of interest as Steve's Mesurado Group of Companies was gobbling up Liberian businesses. Students, notably at the University of Liberia and Cuttington University College, took full advantage of their free speech rights, as they demanded government further open up the political space with a number of specific measures, including voting rights, by moving from a position of "no land no vote" to "one man one vote." The University of Liberia student news organ, *The Revelation*, featured editors Vittorio Weeks, Othello Brandy, Ernestine Cassell, Carl Patrick Burrowes, Willard Russell, and Keith Best, along with guest editor Albert Porte. This is not

a mere listing of names. The names are a critical part of the narrative. Liberians from diverse social backgrounds were engaging their leaders.

Three social movements that came to lead the charge of the opposition included MOJA (Movement for Justice in Africa), led by Togba Nah Tipoteh (and which included such notables as Amos Sawyer, H. Boima Fahnbulleh, Jr., and Dew Mayson), PAL (The Progressive Alliance of Liberia) led by Gabriel Bacchus Matthews, and ULAA (the Diaspora-based Union of Liberian Associations in the Americas). PAL voiced its dissent principally through its news organ, *The Voice of the Revolution*.

In his Annual Message to the legislature in January 1979, the President spoke of 19 illegal strikes, many of them violent and defiant, involving 25,000 workers at the leading foreign concession areas, losing one million man-hours to national productivity. There were links between the actions of workers and the respective agendas of MOJA and PAL. Tolbert painted a bleak picture, especially of the economic situation, but then quickly assured the lawmakers of mitigating measures his administration was undertaking. He expressed the hope as well that the fall in prices of Liberia's leading commodities of iron ore and rubber would soon be reversed.

In the midst of these challenges a pattern persisted of governance by commissions or committees, rather than the more decisive “the buck stops here” approach. What, one might ask, was happening behind the scenes in the political sphere? Were those who felt threatened by change inactive or quietly pursuing their private political ends?

President Tolbert attempted change from what he inherited, namely, a strong executive system with the president, especially under Tubman, as chief magistrate, who arbitrated disputes between interest groups. The functioning of the system rested on a president with unquestioned authority and whose decisions were viewed as relatively impartial. But Tolbert had posited an alternative to this system of governance, cultivating an alliance with indigenous elements and some young technocrats in the society, and engaging opposition elements, though with caution given the fact that the old guards of the TWP remained present and potent. Indecisiveness soon set in as, for example, the Cabinet's Rice Committee was engaged in interminable discussions “while Rome burned.”

The challenge that turned into a crisis had to do with the availability and cost of rice, Liberia's staple food. Agriculture Minister Florence Chenoweth proposed, in the context of the government's desire to move the country toward food self-sufficiency, an increase in the price of imported rice in order to stimulate local production. The goal was to take the country to rice self-sufficiency. The proposal carried with it a problem for consumers in a depressed

economy but potentially for the government as well. This may have been the primary reason why the President decided to study the issue with the establishment of the Cabinet's Rice Committee. The opposition, led by PAL soon found in the issue a cause célèbre as it suggested a sinister government motive. Even MOJA's Amos Sawyer suggested that an "association of morons" would see through what the government was attempting. PAL claimed that the scheme was designed to enrich local producers who included rich farmers, among them some friends and relatives of the President, including perhaps the President himself. The government, the claim went, was seeking profit for its friends on the backs of the struggling masses.

Consider this revealing private note from Agriculture Minister Chenoweth to Foreign Minister Dennis at a January 25, 1979 Cabinet meeting; Chenoweth wrote:

Cecil, Thanks so much for your support on the price of rice. But most of all thanks for your complete understanding of the situation even though you are not a rice producer. This shows your open mindedness, foresight and ability to see things as they are irrespective of your personal gain or loss. I respect you for this! I feel sorry for the President who will be blamed either way. Hope he had more people who could advise him without self-interest, instead of saying one thing before him and laughing at him behind his back. Thanks and keep up your style of life. You can't go wrong this way. Florence.

Chenoweth resigned her portfolio following the April 14<sup>th</sup> protests. Dennis kept soldiering on for another year until the April 12, 1980 coup. He was among 13 officials publicly executed on April 22, 1980.

At 37 years of age with a little over four years of government experience, I was a deputy minister of state largely endeavoring to implement decisions taken. This does not mean that I did not seek opportunities to influence decisions, when I could. In the months preceding the April 14<sup>th</sup> crisis, the President had appointed Dr. Mary Antoinette Brown Sherman, a progressive educator as President of the University of Liberia. In play also was the already mentioned "Report of the Private Sector Commission on Improving Investment Possibilities in Liberia" or the Parker Commission Report, named after its chairman, P. Clarence Parker. The Amos Sawyer Monrovia mayoral contest was making political waves, as was President Tolbert's Pan-Africanist and Third World solidarity foreign policies. All of the foregoing came down to political contestation involving the forces of change challenging those of the status quo. The Umpire President was not always clear in the calls he made.



Gabriel Bacchus Matthews and his colleagues remained engaged in a series of meetings with Tolbert on the rice issue. Matthews was leader and chief spokesman for the PAL social movement that aspired to become a political party. Organized in the US, it transferred to the home base and soon stepped up its political activities in a conducive political environment. The arguments between the government and the opposition could not be more contrasting. The government characterized the meetings as “sustained dialogue with individuals and citizen groups.” Tolbert’s policy goal was rice self-sufficiency, with interim arrangements that protected consumers and producers equally. The street version of this policy was that government planned a steep increase in the price of rice coupled with a ban on rice imports after 1980 in order to stimulate local production. PAL focused not only on the hardship to the masses that any increase in the price of rice would entail but also the not so implicit concern for windfall profits by producers, who reportedly included the President himself and well-placed individuals in the upper crust of society. As Matthews pressed, Tolbert kept insisting that no decision had been made, even suggesting that he would not act under duress.

MOJA, the other vocal opposition group, was on the political stage prior to PAL’s establishment in Liberia. MOJA consisted of methodical intellectuals, while PAL portrayed the image of street politicians ready to do battle, political and otherwise. One PAL operative told me years later that Matthews was not a consultative leader. He sensed an opening and went on to establish around his person a cult-like figure. The street adored him, while MOJA at one point characterized the “go for broke” action of PAL as “infantile.”

Matthews’ PAL soon forced the issue. Rice then became the cause and the alibi, the cause for dissidents who accused the government of raising the price and profiteering, and the alibi for the government that claimed it was searching for a policy that would benefit both consumers and farmers, and that PAL displayed ulterior political motives. Henceforth, the matter became a struggle for power, preserving it on part of government and wresting it away on part of all opposition elements. Ominously, Minister of Justice Oliver Bright issued a press release on April 12, 1979 (one year later to the date Tolbert was assassinated and his government overthrown). The press release read in part:

Information reaching Government indicates that, in spite of the clearly stated position of the Government announced over radio and television, a group of persons appear determined to disregard the laws of Liberia and violate it with impunity. We have also learned that this Group is also attempting to get the school children to participate with them in this illegal demonstration. The Government of Liberia sees this as a direct

challenge to and defiance of its authority and it shall not allow it. The challenge will be squarely faced and met.

The die was cast. The much-vaunted Liberian political stability faced an existential threat. Fault lines in society were being drawn. It was more than the emigrant/indigene cleavage that most Liberians readily related to. Other fault lines were elite/urban masses, haves/have-nots, rural/urban, and cleavages among religious groups.

A countdown of sorts soon followed. Strong perception on each side blurred the exchange. Each side seemed to have ulterior motives. In a last exchange between Matthews and Tolbert, the former invoked a meeting of 28 March to which he had led a “people’s delegation.” He questioned whether government could help farmers or producers without increasing the price of rice? Tolbert’s response was that such a consideration was under study.

Tolbert directed me to respond to Matthews’ letter. I did so, setting forth official policy, which boiled down to a desire to safeguard the interests of consumers and producers alike. My response also stated that mass demonstrations in violation of law would not be countenanced. The eleventh-hour mediation efforts of Albert Porte and Episcopal Bishop George Browne, as well as the urgings of Senator Shad Tubman and perhaps others, were to no avail. These personalities urged the government to relax the rules and allow a peaceful protest. The government did not oblige; Matthews remained adamant.

In the face of a mounting crisis, I worked all day on Good Friday, April 13, 1979, my letter to Matthews being perhaps my last task before I went home. The President then telephoned me around midnight instructing me to call a meeting of the Cabinet for 8 am on Saturday, April 14. I spent the next several hours on the phone calling Cabinet officers, the Vice President, the Speaker of the House and the Secretary General of the TWP. Out of bed at early break of day, I was off to work at the Mansion. Matilda was in Sinoe visiting her parents, as was Minister Townsend, though attending a church meeting. I was therefore doubling up as director of the Cabinet and acting minister of state.

At the special Cabinet meeting of April 14, the room was tense. Tolbert reported on his meetings with PAL, reviewed the issue of defiance, reiterating the Justice Minister Oliver Bright’s hardline press release. The minister’s release mentioned leaflets issued by students of UL calling on the army, police, and security forces to join the demonstration, an act the minister called seditious. In a fighting mood, Tolbert likened himself to a cassava snake. When a sensitive part is touched, swift reaction will follow. I was asked to read my directive letter to Matthews; the President commented: “You take time to kill ants you get the guts” (methodical approach to issues yields the best outcome).



The justice minister added that the UL students were likening April 14 to the October Revolution in Russia. There was no expressed dissent in the Cabinet. Instead, all expressions were in solidarity, and in favor of prompt and decisive action. However, there may have been some mental reservations, reservations I heard, for example, in murmurs by Minister of Information Jenkins Peal following the meeting. Though he resigned his position in the post-April 14 period, he was lamenting what he saw as excessive permissiveness on the part of the regime. Minister Jenkins Peal was married to my cousin. Decades later, as I called to speak to her while we were all in exile in the US, he answered the phone, and, when he recognized I was the caller, proceeded to vent his true feelings dating back to the events of 1979, as he insinuated my sympathy for the dissidents.

Although we dispersed, Cabinet officers were requested to stay at their ministries. The President descended from the seventh floor Cabinet room to his fourth floor office. In the absence of Minister Townsend, I sat at his desk in an acting capacity. The atmosphere at the Mansion was somber as security people were in and out of the President's office all day. From where I sat, I received three items after the President had read them, copies of all three of which I decided to keep. One was a hand-written note from Amos Sawyer to Dew Mayson, which was intercepted by the Superintendent of Sinoe County John Dominic Bing and brought to the President. Sawyer, in Monrovia, was warning Mayson, in Greenville, about the developments against progressive forces in Monrovia, including the reported arrival of Guinean troops. Sawyer urged Mayson to stay put in Sinoe, where he was. The second item was a private note from Mrs. Tolbert to her husband. It implored him to "lend me your ears" and added "at 12 o'clock we will go down in prayers, Oh God help us!" Signed "SH" (Sugar Heart, as I gathered from Mrs. Tolbert's post-coup book).

The third item was a one-page draft statement from Maryland County Senator Shad Tubman imploring the President to speak to the nation, rescind the "no demonstration" order, reverse the goal of rice self-sufficiency, and even decrease the price of rice. Tubman also pleaded for amnesty to all involved in leading the defiance and ordering all law enforcers to return to their barracks and places of defense. The President was supposed to take these steps in light of alarming reports of bloodshed and the loss of precious Liberian lives that had begun.

By mid-morning, reports began coming in of clear defiance. The details were being conveyed to the President verbally in his office while I sat at Minister Townsend's desk. I would learn many years later that Dr. Nehemiah Cooper, chief medical officer at the JFK Medical Center, had called Wilfred Clarke, then deputy for security operations of the Ministry of State, imploring security

forces to hold fire as far too many dead and seriously wounded were arriving at JFK, where he was receiving them. Cooper later used the term “wading in blood.”

On the surface, the protest was organized and led by Matthews’ PAL to compel government to refrain from the anticipated increase in the price of rice. The minister of agriculture had recommended, in context, increase in the price of rice as a means of encouraging local producers and eventually ending rice importation. Tolbert’s reaction was the establishment of a Cabinet’s Rice Committee to study the issue. The committee had apparently not completed its work when rumors circulated that the government was on the verge of implementing the minister’s recommendation. The President was pressured to take a decision, preferably disallowing an increase. Tolbert attempted to resist the mounting pressure. The pressure mounted nevertheless, because the cause that prompted the protest was very popular. It was more than an economic issue of increase in food prices. The specific rice issue was symbolic of significant disaffection with the government by the masses of the governed. This is why Matthews’ PAL, on the day of protest, was joined by most opposition sympathizers, a massive throng of young people, and eventually elements of the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL). In brief, what started as a protest to dissuade government from increasing the price of rice soon morphed into a clash of wills between the government and a massive crowd now presumed to be led by the opposition of all persuasions.

On the streets this massive throng faced government security forces reportedly led by the Liberian National Police Force (LNPF) and the AFL, though the latter, or elements thereof, soon joined the protesters. The soldiers’ claim was that they shared the grievances of the protesters. I have not seen any credible account of what actually transpired on the streets that fateful day. I was virtually “locked in the cabinet,” to borrow the caption of US Labor Secretary Robert Reich’s book. What little I learned subsequently is that the security forces, led by the police, opened fire on the protesters.

When the melee subsided, a significant number of Liberians lay dead or injured and property worth millions of dollars was destroyed. This situation so exposed the government’s vulnerability that some have suggested that a coup d’état could have happened that very day, April 14, 1979. Beyond these dramatic developments lay the fact that Liberia’s age-old TWP-led hegemonic oligarchy now stood like the emperor with no clothes. Though the regime under Tolbert was experimenting, in my view, with genuine change, there was widespread resistance and pressure. Elements of the regime resisted; pressure from opposition elements mounted steadily.

At the height of the civil disturbance, officials began running for cover. My brother, Elbert Dunn, an employee of the Foreign Ministry, drove Minister Dennis from his Ashmun Street office to safety in the Sinkor area. Elbert later became special assistant to President Doe's Defense Minister Gray D. Allison, deputy minister of Foreign Affairs, and national orator July 26, 1986. NPFL forces in Monrovia killed him in 1990 during the civil war.

Before day's end on the 14<sup>th</sup> of April, sitting with me in Townsend's office were the Vice President, the President Pro Tempore of the Senate, and the Secretary General of the TWP, and perhaps others I do not now recall. They were to spend the night there. I too spent the night of April 14 at the Mansion, working. City power supply was suddenly shut down by the Liberian Electric Corporation (LEC) and the city was in darkness, including the Mansion. Soon the Mansion's backup generator kicked in, only to go off shortly thereafter plunging the Mansion in utter darkness for about an hour. I heard that the power outages were the work of saboteurs, or an insider sympathizer, or foes of the regime. We survived the night.

A largely marginal militia was in evidence on that day. I saw the superintendent of Sinoe County, who was also commanding general of the Armed Forces of Liberia (an arrangement established during the Tubman administration that had the head of the militia serve as head of all the armed forces of the country; Bing would be the last such official), with a large pistol strapped to his side in the Executive Mansion. What looked like a ragtag unit of the militia from Grand Bassa County showed up at the Mansion, perhaps a day or two following the event, to display support for the government. The President came down clad in his pajamas and robe to meet with them, and show gratitude.

The next morning, Easter 1979, April 15, the President stopped me in the hallway to his office and dictated part of a speech, which I then drafted for broadcast. It was largely conciliatory though the indecisive proclivities persisted. The President then released me to go home and freshen up. Security arranged a vehicle to take me, as my own car had a flat tire. Security held guns outside the car window, as I was driven from the Executive Mansion to my Paynesville home. I would return and continue the non-stop work.

Meanwhile, much else was going on. Perhaps it was the very evening of April 14<sup>th</sup> that Guinean Ambassador to Liberia, Ben Doua Touré, established contact through Foreign Minister Dennis, suggesting in effect that the treaty of Mutual Defense and Non-aggression between the two countries might be activated given the situation. On April 15<sup>th</sup>, President Sékou Touré sent a radio message to President Tolbert, which reads in part:

The announcement of grave disturbances of the social peace in Monrovia by an opposition group has plunged us in serious uneasiness. Our first reaction has been to come to your help by our own self to show our total and unconditional solidarity. It is after a discussion with the members of the National Political Bureau of the Democratic Party of Guinea that our departure was deferred to send a delegation to first make contact with you in view of knowing the elements of the new situation.

He continued:

This delegation which came to you has already made its report on the talks. As soon as the military situation has been fully considered the troops of Macenta and N'Zerekore are placed on the alert and ready to come to Monrovia as soon as we will have received instructions on your part. In Conakry a squadron of MIGs and some military planes with important equipments are also at your side as of the first signal from you.

The Guinean leader continued:

Besides, we have had two telephone communications with our brother President Houphouët Boigny who is also very affected by the situation which we are experiencing in Monrovia. He has decided to join us in preparing planes loaded with supplies in arms and ammunitions. We are prepared to assume our responsibilities. Be convinced for we know that those who are at the base of this disorder are the true enemies of the Liberian people and partisans of reactionary policies. Our analysis of the situation is that we must not minimize the authors of this trouble supported in their illegal and brutal action by certain camouflaged Liberian personalities, indeed certain foreign quarters residing in Liberia as well as in foreign parts. We suggest that you address yourself immediately to the people of Liberia to denounce the instigators of the troubles and their wicked intentions. The people must mobilize themselves to defend the regime and guarantee the social progress, which you have wisely and with vigor, promoted in all social sectors of the country.

President Touré added:

Your enemies are those of the people, that is those who do not want favorable change for the laboring masses of the populace and who, in order to

succeed in their dishonest action, create confusion to give the appearance of progressive men when they are the true artisans of regression, if one judges by the bandism which they manifestly showed, since the start of these events. The Liberian army must, with firmness impose itself on the bandits. We are sure that victory will be on our side because nothing will be withheld for the triumph of the cause of legality, of legitimacy that you incarnate as a president democratically elected by his people.

These events must subsequently lead to a profound analysis so that with the policy of democratic progress that you are following, the regime may be provided the appropriate means to impose itself on its enemies. Here, the purpose is to provide the national party a very large social base, and a permanent democratic life, so that honest cadres may be produced loyal to the people and decided to lead to victory, the struggle against the agents of imperialism. We are permanently listening out as we follow the unfolding of events and adopt our action to the demands of solidarity that is required of you and us alike. We send you all our wishes of success in this trial which constitutes, we are certain, a new point of departure for a policy of national renewal the ampler and rigor of which must constantly be accentuated to henceforth prevent all attempts to put into question the achievements of the brotherly people of Liberia and of the peace which it needs for harmonious development. With the assurance of the firm and unconditional support of the people and Government of Guinea, we ask you to believe in our faithful friendship and our total solidarity.

It may appear ironic that Touré, who began his political career as a trade union organizer and then who became what some saw as a Marxist president, would characterize Matthews' progressive group as an enemy of the people and of progress. Touré may have been probing, trying to understand the nature of PAL. I share the view that Marxism in the African context was often opportunistic. It was a tool in the service of African liberation and then a means of consolidating independence. As Aimé Césaire of Martinique put it, when disillusionment led him to resign from the French Communist Party, "What I desire is that Marxism and Communism should serve Black people and not that Black people should serve Marxism." Bacchus Matthews and his "progressive" colleagues were, I believe, employing socialism as a tool to further their objectives of radical change in Liberia. I have observed the Liberian progressives over time and think one would be hard-pressed to characterize any of them as a classical Marxist or Communist.

Touré's Guinea was taking an initiative. It is interesting to note that in her April 14 note to her husband, Mrs. Victoria Tolbert had pleaded with him to seek military assistance from the Ivorian president. I have no evidence that Tolbert ever did that. What I can describe with certainty is the sequence of events that then ensued. President Tolbert was mulling over whether to accept Guinean troops. I am sure he questioned the wisdom of bringing in this foreign force, as he spoke with a number of his aides. He even asked me one evening, while walking on the terrace of his eighth floor presidential suite, perhaps the evening before the troops landed in Monrovia at Spriggs Payne Airport. "What do you think of the idea of bringing in Guinean troops," he asked me. I was surprised as he had never before asked my views about a pending policy matter, especially one of such magnitude. Remember, I was still a deputy minister with no access to official intelligence. Here is how I responded. "Mr. President, I think this should depend on what your security advisors are saying to you." I stopped there, implying that I did not have the intelligence upon which to base an informed opinion, nor was I privy to what was going on within the inner sanctum of the administration. Things came to me in the course of the job, and I responded as best I could, though I was in full agreement with the reform agenda of the Tolbert presidency. Tolbert continued his walk, all alone, no doubt agonizing over the offer from his friend and brother, President Touré.

The issue arises about how the President received intelligence. Coming from the foreign ministry as I did, I am aware that the foreign minister saw the President daily, at which time he briefed the President about major developments abroad and their implications for the country. The President himself listened to radio news, notably that of the BBC. The substantive and regular intelligence that he received came from Wilfred Clarke, who, following his service as Director of the Special Security Service (SSS) and chief bodyguard to the President, became deputy minister of state in charge of security affairs and subsequently deputy minister for operations at the Ministry of National Security. It was Clarke's job, he confirmed to me, to gather intelligence from the various intelligence agencies and prepare briefings for the President. Since 1975, there existed a National Security Council (NSC) to assist in the formulation of policies and the making of major decisions relating to national security. Members of the council, led by the President, included the ministers of justice, defense, foreign affairs, and finance. Ad hoc members were the minister of state, the chairman of TWP, the advisor to the President on security affairs, and the deputy minister of state in charge of national security. Wilfred Clarke held the latter position before he made a lateral move to the Ministry of National Security, when that agency was created in late 1979.

I frequently encountered Clarke with his briefing folder as he prepared to enter the President's office for the briefing. It does not seem that the minister of state received regular security briefings, though he was an ad hoc member of the National Security Council. I received no briefing and attended no meeting of the NSC for the six-month period I would serve as minister of state. The one exception was when the President appointed me Chair of the Cabinet, while he visited Nimba County in March 1980. What I do vividly recall is an occasion, while I was still deputy minister; my friend Wilfred Clarke called me aside as he waited to enter the President's office, opened his folder to a page where my name appeared "Deputy Minister Dunn is a staunch member of MOJA. ..." Though I was never a member of MOJA or any other opposition group, the security analysis of the day held that I was a member because of my free association with leaders of such organizations, notably Amos Sawyer, whose friendship dated to the early 1960s when we were members of the YMCA and the National Student Christian Council. Though I heard the reference, even in a Cabinet meeting, to "a PhD club" that supposedly included some of us in the Cabinet not only like Local Government Minister Edward Kesselly, Minister of State Without Portfolio Charles Clarke, and Education Minister Bernard Blamo but also people like Togba Nah Tipoteh, H. Boima Fahnbulleh, and Sawyer, President Tolbert never questioned me about this or any loyalty issues. On the contrary, he reaffirmed confidence in me when his senator-brother Frank Tolbert later dressed me down once for signing the Brownell Commission Report, of which I was a member duly appointed by the President.

Decades later as Wilfred Clarke and I reminisced, he acknowledged the 1970s arrangement. When I asked him pointedly about intelligence briefings for Minister Townsend, his response was ambivalent, suggesting why the minister of state was an ad hoc rather than a full and regular member of the NSC. When I asked Clarke about why I was not given security briefings when I succeeded Townsend, his response was that I was perceived by the security establishment as an opposition sympathizer. As I sought to know, for research purposes, the fate of his top-secret briefing papers in the aftermath of the coup, Clarke said that they were secured in a safe in his office at the Executive Mansion, and that those who staged the 1980 coup broke into the safe. They took what was useful to them and destroyed all else. There is no telling what their successors did to the secret files of the Samuel Doe regime.

After the fact, Tolbert revealed to the legislature and the Liberian people how he arrived at his decision to invite the Guinean troops.

... In consultation with the members of the National Security Council, leaders of the National Legislature, and based on our analysis of reports



we have received, we considered it in the best interest of the security of the State to accept the assistance offered by President Touré to cooperate with our own Armed Forces, in containing the crisis and maintaining peace and order; to secure the lives and protect the properties of all our people and foreign residents.

He added that a

full contingent of well-equipped men of the GAF arrived this morning and are available to support our efforts as well as to restore peace and order in support of our men, should the need arise.

On the morning of April 15, I learned that Guinean troops had landed at Spriggs Payne Airport and that initially the security people at the airport refused to allow them to disembark the aircraft, as there were no instructions on the matter. Calls were made, and both Defense Minister Burleigh Holder and Army Chief of Staff Henry Korboy Johnson sprung into action. The Guinean troops disembarked and were led to the Executive Mansion grounds where they remained for a month and three days, never seeing action, as they arrived after the fact. The demonstration was over. The damage had been done.

The government was now in damage control mode. The old machinery of the TWP cranked up in expressions of confidence, identification, and solidarity with at least its titular head, President Tolbert. Everyone stated they wanted to join forces for immediate national reconstruction. Expressions of international solidarity came from Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, and the United States. Côte d'Ivoire sent nonlethal equipment and medical supplies, as did the United States.

The President made a second address to the nation on April 16, 1979, this time, at the initiative of Minister Townsend who had now returned from Sinoe and was back at his desk. The address hued to a harder line than did the 15<sup>th</sup> April address. One day later, the President addressed the legislature. Were there too many speeches in rapid succession? Press Secretary Henry B. Cole said as much to me at the time.

Meanwhile, news reached Tolbert on April 21st about the fugitive PAL leader Matthews, who was still in hiding, while some of his colleagues had already been arrested and charged for their roles in the April 14 protest. The bearer of the news was prominent lawyer and former Attorney General Joseph J.F. Chesson. According to Chesson, Matthews had sent a young man named Mulbah to him to request that he consider defending him. Chesson's immediate reaction was that, given the leading political roles he had played in the past, it would be difficult for him to stand against the government. Nevertheless,



because the constitution guaranteed everyone a proper legal defense, he would consider representing Matthews, a person he knew very well. But he would first have to inform the government. So, Matthews was advised to stay in place while Chesson went to inform President Tolbert.

Chesson soon related the details to Tolbert at the Mansion, and the President's response was to provide a security escort, in the person of Deputy Minister Wilfred Clarke, for Matthews. Chesson and Clarke then went to Matthews' hideout to fetch him. Led by Mulbah, they went through a complex process before Matthews emerged from a Lynch Street hideout. Chesson, Clarke, and Matthews then headed for the Mansion. In the President's office awaiting them were the Vice President, the Speaker, the President Pro-Tempore, Minister Townsend, Justice Minister Oliver Bright, Information Minister Peal, Sinoe County Superintendent and AFL Commanding General, J. Dominic Bing, and Assistant Minister Julius Kroma, who was also Private Secretary to the President. Kroma took notes of the meeting.

Chesson began by providing the gathered officials the details about his involvement in the saga. He then also reminded them of his past security and political roles in the government – former chief of security, former attorney general, etc. – adding that, as a Past Grand Master of the United Brothers of Friendship (UBF) and a Master Mason, he could never stand against the country. President Tolbert thanked Chesson whom he called “Jeff” and appreciated Chesson's remarks about putting Liberia first in all actions. Tolbert, however, distanced himself from Chesson's references to membership in fraternities. Tolbert said pointedly that he would react as a man and as President of Liberia, and not as a mason. He added that he was responsible for the country, and he would defend it to the last ounce of energy and force at his command, stressing that he would act only in the supreme interest of Liberia. Addressing himself to Matthews, Tolbert told him what he had said before the protest of defiance, namely that Matthews would lose control of his followers and plunge the country into a catastrophe. This is exactly what had now happened. He spoke to Matthews about the folly of his ways and the consequences wrought. Matthews showed contrition as Tolbert hammered away, saying to Matthews that he was lucky he was not killed and that he should be mourning those whom Matthews' action had sent to their untimely graves.

The President continued by reiterating what he had said to Chesson earlier, namely that Matthews and his colleagues would be accorded a fair trial as the courts and the laws require. Tolbert revealed that he had had a number of cordial meetings with Matthews prior to the protest, and that at one of the meetings he had responded to Matthews' request for a loan of \$1,000, which had not been repaid and for which Tolbert had taken no action. Matthews affirmed

what the President said about the loan. He then expressed regrets for the situation. Matthews and the President then entered into an exchange, in which they replayed the dispute over the price of rice issue, with Matthews claiming that he and 24 of his colleagues had been left with the impression that Tolbert would have made a decision about the controversy before April 14<sup>th</sup>, while Tolbert insisted that he had said no such thing.

In the end, President Tolbert repeated that the matter for which arrests were made was now with the Courts and the defendants had the right to defense counsel. He admonished Matthews to demean himself, cause no more trouble, and the law would take its course. Tolbert then directed Minister of Justice Oliver Bright to have Matthews taken into custody, and dealt with only in keeping with the provisions of the Laws of Liberia, and face justice. Pleading for mercy, Matthews was then escorted out of the President's office to prison.

Soon the issue arose of the prospect of a visit of solidarity from President Touré and President Houphouët Boigny. I received a phone call from Guinean Ambassador Ben Doua Touré and conveyed the message to President Tolbert. His two African brothers intended to visit May 7, arriving at 11 a.m. and departing at 4 p.m., if this was convenient to Tolbert. The President was elated. Preparations for the visit were soon set in motion, including what later became a problematic announcement made by the President himself, as he delivered a speech (establishing the Brownell Commission on May 5, 1979) so that the people might prepare to welcome the brotherly presidents.

We were disturbed to receive a second message of clarification from President Touré, which was that President Houphouët Boigny could not come on the original date of the 7<sup>th</sup>, because of a schedule conflict that he had not been aware of. Tolbert decided to send me as special envoy to President Touré. My brief was two-fold: First, understand why President Houphouët cannot now come, but also whether Touré would consider coming alone, for otherwise the disappointment of the Liberian people could be no small one, not to speak of the implied serious political embarrassment. Second, in light of the above development, could the departure of the Guinean troops be deferred by one day, so that troops would leave following the Touré visit?

Security Officer Leo Yates accompanied me to Conakry as we flew in a small Air Liberia aircraft out of Spriggs Payne Airport. We accomplished our mission and returned the same day though a bit late in the evening. We drove directly to the Mansion and the President came down to his office to receive us, especially since we had come with a Guinean official. As I first entered the office alone, his first words of greeting to me were "I am happy to see you, for if something had happened to you, I would be finished ..." I never understood the meaning of those words, as I proceeded to deliver my report.

The original initiative for a solidarity visit to Tolbert, Touré had told me, came from Houphouët, who made the suggestion to Touré on April 18. Touré accepted the idea but thought it too soon after the events of April 14<sup>th</sup>. Houphouët next suggested May 4, but this was not convenient to Touré because of previous commitments. Touré then counter-suggested May 7<sup>th</sup>. Houphouët agreed without then knowing of a visit to Côte d'Ivoire of an OAU delegation on the Sahara Question. This was a long-standing dispute over the Western Sahara territory that was claimed by Morocco but resisted by representatives of the territory's people, claiming their rights to self-determination and independence.

Meanwhile, Touré informed his Ambassador in Monrovia and asked him to find out if 7<sup>th</sup> May was convenient for Tolbert. While awaiting a reply, Touré learned of a BBC announcement that a Touré-Houphouët visit to Liberia was imminent. I told the President that, though Touré now understood the circumstances under which the announcement was made, that is, that it did not come from the enemy, his moral stand led him to conclude that the visit should be by both Touré and Houphouët, since the original proposal had come from Houphouët.

Guinean Chief of State Protocol Aly Bangoura had come with us to Monrovia to collaboratively prepare an announcement, to be cleared by Houphouët, that, because of the visit to Abidjan of the OAU Committee on the Sahara, the Touré-Houphouët visit had been postponed to Wednesday, May 18, 1979. Finally, Touré thought that on balance, it was politically better that the original idea of a visit by both be maintained. Otherwise, both Houphouët and international opinion might speculate negatively. The Touré-Houphouët visit materialized on May 18<sup>th</sup>, with all the attending fanfare. The Guinean troops left Liberia quietly thereafter, as Tolbert had requested. Three days later, President Siaka Stevens of Sierra Leone paid a similar solidarity visit, which Tolbert characterized as "intimate." The regional political flanks were covered. The issue that remained was what to do with the domestic Pandora's box that had been violently stirred by the events of April 14, 1979.

## 2 The Brownell Commission

In the aftermath of April 14, 1979, President Tolbert established a commission charged with leading a consultative investigation into the events that eventuated in the disturbances. The genesis of what came to be known as the Brownell Commission is as follows: Professor Patrick L.N. Seyon (1938–2020) of the University of Liberia came to see me at the Mansion on April 19 and

handed me a letter for the President. Seyon was recommending that the President establish a credible independent national commission of inquiry into the violence and destruction of 14<sup>th</sup> April. Before presenting Seyon's letter to Tolbert, I prepared my own accompanying memo. I gave both to Tolbert on April 23. My memo began: "After a crisis such as we have just experienced, the temptation is great to undertake a 'witch hunt.' I feel this is un-Tolbert, would be counterproductive and should consequently be discouraged." I referenced Dr. Seyon's letter and recommended names as possible members of a national commission to look into causes and cures for the violent demonstration. While I do not remember everyone on the list of names I recommended, it included Nete Sie Brownell, a former attorney general in President Edwin Barclay's administration and a vice presidential candidate in the 1955 election when former President Barclay challenged the incumbent President Tubman; and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, then deputy finance minister. President Tolbert's reaction, among other things, was a handwritten note as follows:

Commission on Recovery and Analyzing Suggestions made by Concerned Citizens for Reconstruction of Liberia and making Recommendations to Government for attention (action), Chairman, 1. Hon. Nete Sie Brownell, 2. The President, Liberia Chamber of Commerce [Dr. Christian Baker], 3. Hon. Lawrence Morgan, 4. The Chairman Federation of Liberian Youth (FLY) [Richmond Draper], 5. Counselor Toye C. Barnard, 6. Dr. Flomo Stevens, (University of Liberia and a friend of Tolbert's), 7. Dr. Patrick Seyon, 8. Mrs. Corina Van Ee, 9. Bishop George Browne, 10. Mrs. Sophie Dunbar, 11. General Binyan Kesselly, 12. Father E.G.W. King, 13. Nathaniel Baker, 14. Abraham James, 15. Counselor Robert Azango, 16. Mrs. Elizabeth Collins (having himself struck out Mrs. Ellen Sandamania), 17. Mrs. Luvenia Ash Thompson, 18. Mr. John Scotland, 19. Mrs. Ellen Johnson [Sirleaf], 20. Dr. E.L. Dunn [Tolbert had my name confused with my father's with whom he had together been elected to the Legislature in 1943] – Secretary.

Before things were cleaned up and establishment was made of the final membership, the list was revised to notably include Henry Ford Cooper, J. Dudley Lawrence, Albert T. White, G. Flamma Sherman, David Farhat, and Samuel Greene.

The total membership of the commission ended up being 31 as follows: Counselor Nete Sie Brownell, Chairman, Counselor Toye C. Barnard, Co-Chairman, Hon. Momolu Dukuly, Hon. Henry Ford Cooper, Hon J. Dudley Lawrence, Hon. Roland Cooper, Hon. Lawrence Morgan, Hon. Albert T. White,

Dr. Christian Baker, Mr. Richmond Draper, Dr. Flomo Stevens, Mrs. Corina Van Ee, Dr. Patrick L.N. Seyon, Episcopal Bishop George D. Browne, Mrs. Sophie Dunbar, General Binyan Kesselly, Father Edward G.W. King, Hon. Nathaniel Baker, Professor Abraham James, Counselor Robert Azango, Hon. Elizabeth Collins, Hon. Luvenia Ash-Thompson, Mr. John Scotland, Hon. George Flamma Sherman, Hon. Ellen Johnson–Sirleaf, Hon. David Farhat, Hon. Samuel Greene, Dr. Stephen Yekeson, Mr. Roland Dahn, Miss Massa Crayton, and Dr. D. Elwood Dunn (secretary). The President unveiled this list in an address to the nation at the Centennial Memorial Pavilion. Prior to the address, members had been appropriately alerted.

The composition of the commission suggests, to my mind, Tolbert's seriousness in getting to the root of the problem that the protest symbolized. This is not to say that he did not include people considered his friends. Chairman Brownell had a storied background. As already indicated, he was attorney general in President Edwin Barclay's administration and was former President Barclay's running mate in the 1955 election when Barclay challenged incumbent President Tubman. In the sordid aftermath of the election, Brownell was among a number of prominent persons accused of treason against the state, publicly disgraced and imprisoned. He spent a decade in prison before being pardoned by Tubman. Co-chair Toye Barnard was dean of the Louis Arthur Grimes School of Law at the University of Liberia and a prominent lawyer with the Henries Law Firm. Dukuly was the first indigenous secretary of state under Tubman. Henry Ford Cooper, Roland C. Cooper, and Dudley Lawrence were retired ambassadors, as was G. Flamma Sherman. Sherman was also a former education minister and spouse to University of Liberia President Mary Antoinette Brown Sherman. Lawrence Morgan was a former attorney general under Tolbert. Dr. Flomo Stevens was an economics professor at the UL and a friend of the President. Van Ee and Dunbar were businesswomen and also good friends of Tolbert's, as were Collins, Ash-Thompson, and Fr. King. General Kesselly was the father of Local Government Minister Edward B. Kesselly. Albert White was former chief of staff of the Armed Forces of Liberia and former superintendent of Grand Gedeh County, and Nathaniel Baker was a security expert having served as head of the Executive Action Bureau during the Tubman administration.

This was a national commission that included many critical minds. It was representative of a cross section of Liberian society. The former ambassadors had met with President Tolbert prior to their appointment on the commission to register their strong disapproval over the presence of Guinean troops on Liberian soil. Dr. Seyon was perhaps foremost in representing the views of the progressive social movements of MOJA and PAL. Judging from the tenor of the

deliberations and the thrust of the recommendations, this was not a commission sympathetic to the government. Tolbert was attempting to take the “bull by the horns.”

At the first sitting of the commission on May 10, 1979, Chairman Brownell gave an opening address in which he recalled the events leading to the commission's establishment, and then he said:

After the Capital, yea the country, regained its equilibrium, the President went before the Nation at the Centennial Memorial Pavilion where he had seven years prior taken the oath of office and in reporting to the nation and people as to what transpired in the Capital on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of April, 1979, reviewed his 7-year tenure of office. In that memorable speech, he posed a poignant question to the people of Liberia in these biblical words: “WHAT LACK I YET?”

Brownell continued: NOT BROWNELL'S WORDS

As the outcome of that poignant question and as it were by way of self-scrutiny and examination, the President thought that because he conducted an open government so that all could see what he was doing and that he had nothing to hide, he again did what history seldom records of any leader by laying himself and his government wide open to the whole nation to examine his conduct of the affairs of government and requesting them to point out to him whatever needs to be rectified. This is indeed ‘noblesse oblige!’

It was against this backdrop, the chairman said, that the commission “composed of 31 eminent Liberian men and women” was established and given clear terms of reference, to wit: “the Commission on National Reconstruction is constituted to receive and analyze suggestions from concerned citizens for the reconstruction of Liberia following the recent Civil Disturbances and submit recommendations for the attention of Government.” The time frame of the commission was a month as of May 7, 1979, and matters related to the army were outside the commission's purview. The exclusion of army matters from the commission elicited heated but inconclusive discussion following Brownell's address. The President engaged personally with representatives of all levels of the army in a series of meetings to ascertain “why you deserted me” on April 14. He heard from them an earful of grievances, some of which were reportedly being addressed.

Counselor Brownell proposed a work plan which included issuance of a press release inviting the public to forward written views on reconstruction,

that commission members submit their own views in writing, that a few informed citizens be invited to speak to the commission, that the commission be divided into subcommittees based on problem areas, and that a drafting committee be designated to prepare the commission's final report. He then declared the commission duly opened for business.

Commission members made critical comments that centered on the limited time frame. More importantly, they expressed displeasure about the exclusion of matters regarding the army. In the end, a report on the army prepared by Albert White and a report on security matters prepared by Nathaniel Baker were appended to the commission's report. This did not foreclose recommendations touching some national security matters.

The work plan was discussed and the following working committees were established:

1. Committee on Suggestions (written and oral) chaired by Mrs. Corina Van Ee
2. Committee on Socio-Political Issues chaired by Bishop George D. Browne
3. Committee on Economic, Business, & Financial Matters chaired by Dr. Christian Baker
4. Committee on National Security and Preservation of the Rule of Law chaired by General Albert T. White
5. Committee on Long-Range Issues chaired by Dr. Patrick Seyon
6. The Secretariat was chaired by D. Elwood Dunn.

Other members of the secretariat that came to constitute the drafting team were David Farhat, Luvenia Ash-Thompson, Flomo Stevens, and Abraham James. Though we met in the conference room of the Monrovia City Hall, there was no work space there for the secretariat, and so my office at the Executive Mansion became the work venue for the secretariat, with the following assisting staff: Joseph S. Morris Jr. (Research & Coordination), J. Emmanuel Bowier (Research & Coordination), with the following secretaries in my office at the Executive Mansion: Francis S. Passewe, Elizabeth Johnson, and Oretha M. Logan.

Early submissions to the commission included Albert Porte (an independent player in the saga of April 14<sup>th</sup>), G. Flamma Sherman, Nathaniel Baker, and Special Security Service Director Edward Massaquoi. The Union of Liberian Associations in the Americas (ULAA) in the Diaspora sent a statement signed by its president, G. Moses Duopu, and chairman of its Board of Directors, Charles M. Taylor. MOJA submitted a ten-page paper entitled: "Toward the Reconstruction of Liberian Society: A Proposal For Susukuu (a MOJA-associated self-help rural development project) Corporation's Involvement." Submissions came as well from the Secretary General of the TWP and from the House of



Representatives, both coming through the Office of the President. These two submissions were in sync, as they focused on the economic downturn and the need to address that condition urgently in order to bring relief to the massively unemployed. UL Chemistry Professor and Indian national, Dr. K. Srinivasan, made a very valuable submission. His was one of the most objective appraisals of the national condition with options and consequences for each course of action. I so valued what Dr. Srinivasan had to say that we became very good friends. This friendship was to last far past the time of my government service. He was an informal reader for the book manuscript that Byron Tarr and I wrote and had published in 1988. This means that from the United States I was in touch with Dr. Srinivasan who had returned to India but often visited relatives in the States.

Much then transpired in terms of submissions of all types from citizens from all walks of life. In addition to submissions to the commission, many were made directly to the presidency, which I personally collected for the commission. Professor Amos Sawyer was invited by the socio-political committee to share his views on the state of affairs. He read a statement of 19 pages in which he first established his identity and acknowledged with pride his association with Dr. H. Boima Fahnbulleh and Dew Tuan-Wleh Mayson, both fellow MOJA members and social justice advocates. The burden of his presentation was to speak to causes, immediate and fundamental, of the social explosion that was April 14, 1979. He said that the immediate cause of the civil disturbance was “a faulty series of decision-making on the part of Government concerning the critical commodity of Rice.” The fundamental causes of the disturbance were rooted in the social, economic, and political policies and practices of Liberian society, which Sawyer went on to analyze in the last dozen pages of his presentation. These were policies and practices that privileged a few and disadvantaged the majority. Awareness had come to this alienated majority, and genuine democratic governance was the only way forward. Sawyer’s own subsequent quest to become mayor of Monrovia had the same objective in mind.

With the Commission pressed for time (a one-month mandate), the reports of the various committees were collected, and they constituted the raw material for the task of drafting a report. I took a first cut at a draft and then circulated that draft to members of the secretariat. We met and agreed on a draft before presenting it to the commission as a whole. Of course, we were working in close consultation with Chairman Brownell, serving him copies of various drafts. I personally felt a sense of history as I worked with this iconic elder Liberian statesman who, I later learned, was part of a delegation of “educated



natives” who travelled to the League of Nations in Geneva, Switzerland, in the 1920s in order to represent the interests of indigenous Liberians in the forced labor scandal of that era. I also remembered that in 1955 Brownell was the vice-presidential candidate in former President Edwin Barclay’s serious, but unsuccessful, challenge to a dictatorial President Tubman. In 1977 or 1978, I had casually met and given Counselor Brownell a ride from the Executive Mansion to his home on Benson Street following his being a part of Tolbert’s entourage perhaps to an interior county.

I do not recall that there was any serious disagreement about the contents of the draft report, though many were unhappy with the limited time frame. The draft report, approved by the commission, was entrusted to me to clean up, finalize, and share with commission members, which I dutifully did.

A few days after I returned the report’s final version to the commission, we were all shocked to hear a detailed summary of the commission’s findings and recommendations on BBC Focus on Africa program. As the news percolated through Monrovia the government was placed in an embarrassing position, as some citizens began pressuring for action even before the President had received the report, let alone read it. The President never asked me for the report and I compartmentalized my government duties from my service on the commission. I then had the printed copies locked up in my office on the seventh floor of the Executive Mansion. Some in society began to point an accusatory finger at me, raising questions about my loyalty to the President. President Tolbert himself never did. Instead, he instructed me to personally keep the keys where the copies were secured. The speculation as to who leaked the report continued for a while, as others began to appreciate that I was not the only person with access to the report. There were 30 other people on the commission, as well as my office secretarial staff, who could have leaked the information.

But this important, even critical work was not thereby aborted, for it was not long before that the President received the full commission in an audience for the formal presentation of the commission’s report. The meeting did not start on a happy note as the President immediately raised with Chairman Brownell the issue of the leak to the BBC. I even sensed then in Brownell’s demeanor the courage that led him decades earlier to stand up to the dictatorial President Tubman. Brownell was firm in categorically denying that his commission was responsible for the leak. The President soon dropped that issue, and the formalities of presentation and acceptance of the report were carried out. The President thanked the commission and said that his government would act upon the recommendations appropriately. As we left the fourth floor office of

the President the Executive Mansion photographer was on hand at the main second-floor entrance to take a photograph of the commission. I so regret that I did not seek a copy of this historic photograph, and I have since been unable to locate a copy.

Given the time limit of the commission, the report was presented in two parts. The first part included the recommendations, which the commission requested the President to take action on with some urgency. The second part identified issues which by their nature required detailed and systematic study. The President was requested to “enlarge, equip and extend” the commission’s duration in order to facilitate the second phase of the work. A pre-ambular statement by the commission set the stage as it contextualized the recommendations:

The Commission sees in the Civil Disturbance of April 14, 1979, a manifestation of serious social, economic, and political problems with deep roots in our national society. These problems of justice, liberty and equality are in a real sense a culmination of more than one hundred years of a national leadership that appears to have eroded its constituents’ participation in a meaningful way.

Based on findings from the public consultations and hearings, as well as its own analysis, the commission recommended dissolution of the Cabinet’s Rice Committee and liberalization of rice importation, the granting of general amnesty to all imprisoned for the protest, and an investigation of government officials deemed responsible for the events of April 14. Two studies appended to the report addressed issues of the armed and security forces: “The Liberian Armed Forces and The National Crisis,” and “The National Security Situation in Light of the Recent Disturbances in Monrovia.”

Soliciting reaction to the report, President Tolbert convened a meeting of the Cabinet and the executive committees of the House of Representatives and of the Senate. The session was revealing, as interventions by the officials and legislators reflected views on what was transpiring in society. It showed a pattern of three clusters of views: those supportive of change, those desiring to preserve the status quo, and those straddling the first two. Senator Charles Sherman of Cape Mount County and a former Secretary of the Treasury, and Senator William V.S. Tubman, Jr. (Shad Tubman) of Maryland County and son of former President Tubman were more substantive and constructive in their comments. For this reason, they attracted supporters to their viewpoints. They were also supportive of change.

### 3 Cabinet and the Report

As Director of the Cabinet, it was my duty to cite the Cabinet to a meeting at the direction of the President. In addition to members of the Cabinet, the Vice President, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the Secretary General of the TWP regularly attended Cabinet meetings. This time I was directed to invite as well members of the executive committees of the House of Representatives and the Senate. So, we had a full house. The purpose of the meeting, presided over by the President, was to acquire the views of these officials and legislators on the Brownell Commission Report. The President began by informing the gathering that he had received the commission's report and would formally announce the government's response. I read the report in full as Director of the Cabinet but perhaps also as secretary of the commission.

The President then proceeded to inform the body of developments since the report's submission, particularly a denial statement from the commission of any responsibility for leaking the report to the BBC. He went on to add that the government was already attending to many of the recommendations included in the report. He was now requesting the assembled officials' reactions to the report.

Vice President Warner began by questioning the validity of the document regarding the number of public suggestions and interpretation of the data, adding that he had nothing against the recommendations as such, but that he saw certain weaknesses in procedures. Speaker Henriëns then chimed in with the view that, since the government was already attending to most of the matters indicated in the report, the commission should have mentioned what government has been doing, vaguely adding that government implement the various recommendations in a way and manner conducive to the people's interest. TWP Secretary General Robert I.E. Bright picked up on what he saw as inconsistencies in the report: amnesty for prisoners and investigation of certain officials of government.

President Pro Tempore of the Senate Frank Tolbert disagreed with the recommendation that cash assets of officials of government be revealed, while saying "no" to a number of other recommendations in the report. "What right have they to say such a thing?" Regarding the President's relatives' engagement in business, he thought the reference unfair. "Penalized for being relatives of the President?" he asked rhetorically.

Foreign Minister Dennis expressed his personal views, since it was difficult to speak on the Cabinet's behalf as the foreign minister traditionally did in his capacity as Dean of the Cabinet. He thought the report deserved serious consideration, as usual, on the part of the President. Finance Minister J.T. Phillips

referred to inconsistencies in the report, adding that the government was already addressing most of the recommendations in the economic and financial areas. He promised a fuller reaction in writing, which he did subsequently. Phillips' submission was in essence a summary of the Parker Commission Report on the state of the economy, which was highly critical of the government's economic policy.

Minister of State for Presidential Affairs Reginald Townsend, my immediate supervisor, picked up on the imbalance theme, as he declared that the "entire report is set up against government. It is an attempt to attack the reputation of the government of the Republic of Liberia." He saw the report as being "out of its terms of reference." "What was the whole objective behind the report?" Townsend wondered. He considered the report's suggestion of a public opposed to the government a most biased assertion. His concrete suggestion was that the report be given to a Cabinet committee for thorough investigation, perhaps to meet the same fate, as did the Parker Commission Report or the commission from the private sector that reviewed the economic situation and offered recommendations. A Cabinet committee appointed by Tolbert to review the Parker report, eviscerated the report, dismissing most of its recommendations because they were critical of government policies.

Minister of State Without Portfolio Charles Clarke thought that the government should so handle the report that it does not convey the impression that opposition to government is being rewarded. The precedent would be dangerous. Justice Minister Chesson questioned the "integrity" of the first paragraph of the report's acknowledgment. He also questioned the commission's procedures suggesting that the commission should have appended letters and other documents received from the public (which incidentally, were in fact all available). He attacked the integrity of the chairman and the co-chairman. Tearing into the report in strong derogatory language, Chesson asserted that the commission went outside its authority, indicting "all Administrations from J.J. Roberts to William R. Tolbert, Jr." He wanted the commission closed down and its members not even be thanked.

Labor Minister Estrada Bernard expressed reservations about some of the recommendations but strongly asserted that the report could serve a useful purpose. Considering the one-month time frame for the commission's work, he felt the report should not be cast aside. Cape Mount County Representative Momo Jones suggested that his House executive committee be given an opportunity to study the report, but then went on to concur with the views of the justice minister.

Maryland County Senator W.V.S. Tubman Jr. first said that he would discuss aspects of the report in private with the President. Tubman was probably

attempting to avoid openly expressing views critical of his father-in-law's government. He then added, however, that the commission was to look into what was wrong, not what was right in society. He expressed fears regarding the government's credibility, and in this connection he referred to the fate that befell the Parker Commission Report. He suggested that individual matters be clarified and the report made public.

Holding a much different point of view, Defense Minister Burleigh Holder began by challenging Senator Tubman's assertion regarding the commission's terms of reference. Interestingly, both Holder and Tubman were sons-in-law to President Tolbert. Holder vehemently attacked and condemned the report, calling it illogical and an attempt to break down the government. He indicated agreement with the labor minister in one respect, that the report was revealing in that the government now knew the political leanings of the commission's members. Representative Emma Campbell asked for a copy of the report for study before offering comments.

Grand Bassa County Senator Joseph Findley called the report non-objective and biased, reflecting more the views of its members than the people's sentiments. He wanted the report set aside as the effort was not a serious one. Rivercess Territory Representative Francis Gbasaigee wanted to know whether the commission received any suggestions in favor of the government, adding that he was personally aware of suggestions from the public favorable to the government. He wanted the report tabled for further study. Grand Gedeh County Representative Harper Bailey suggested the commission not be granted more time as requested to delve deeper into other issues but that rather it be dissolved forthwith. Lofa County Senator Ernest Liberty urged that the report be studied and the appropriate conclusions drawn. Commerce Minister John F. Sherman thought the views reflected in the report were those of a small segment of the population. He wanted the public informed about the report while pointing out the flaws.

Cape Mount County Senator Charles Sherman was an astute statesman whose name had surfaced as a possible vice president of Liberia when Vice President Tolbert succeeded to the presidency in July 1971. Tolbert reportedly said in reference to a possible Vice President Sherman: "Would you take a snake and place it in your bosom?" Sherman now declared that it worried him to listen to suggestions that the report be rejected or ignored. Referring to the significance of the undertaking, he cautioned that the world awaited the government's reaction. "The report does not please most of us: there are the imbalances and the flaws, etc. But it would do more harm to your image if you sit tight on it," the senator said to the President. "Release the report to the public, indicating necessary explanations. Accept what you want to accept;

reject what you want to reject, calling a spade a spade.” Alluding to those who branded members of the commission opponents of government, Sherman wondered aloud whether Corina Van Ee (a commission member and a known Tolbert sympathizer) could be considered a government opponent? “Don’t reply general criticism with general rejection,” the Senator continued. “Simply address the main matters. There is no power usurpation as some suggest. It’s all recommendations. As the President addresses the nation on the matter it is important to refer to the BBC release, then proceed to accept, explain, and indicate further study.”

Land and Mines Minister Cletus Wortorson began by placing the commission’s work against the backdrop of April 14<sup>th</sup>. Part of the report for him was acceptable, while other parts were biased. The commission should be thanked for its work and those useful parts of the report appropriately acted upon. Information Minister Peal endorsed the views of Senator Sherman. Health and Social Welfare Minister Kate Bryant suggested the report be released with the government strongly stating its views. The world will see the flaws. In a second round of comments, Foreign Minister Dennis endorsed the views of Senator Sherman. An added comment from the Vice President: “When you born a child, you must accept it the way it is. I endorse Senator Sherman’s views.”

The President then replied saying:

Thanks for views expressed by all. I never intended not to take appropriate action on the report. If you have acted in service to the country, I thank you. I will react in service to the country. Despite the BBC release, I will act upon the report. Neither did I intend to submit it to another committee. Anyone desiring to send written statements, okay. I have my own ideas about the report. I already have a draft [pointing to Director of the Cabinet Dunn then furiously taking notes] of my address to the nation in reaction to the report. I am moving step by step. First, I received the report, next I called this meeting, and then directly to the people. Accordingly, the Information Ministry is to make a general release, and I will speak to the nation on Wednesday or Thursday of next week. The report will be reacted to according to its merit.

True to his word the President addressed the nation on June 26, 1979, at a specially called meeting of the Cabinet. I had done a first draft of the President’s statement. Minister Townsend had edited my draft. It was this edited draft that the President had pointed to at the Cabinet meeting of June 22 with other government officials. Not knowing the President’s mind on the recommendations, my draft had a preamble of about three pages on which he inserted in pen a

phrase. The draft read: “Accordingly, Government has decided on the following measures in reaction to the recommendations of the Commission: 1, 2, etc.” Even the final speech taken to the President at his eighth-floor suite had blank spaces where Tolbert was to address the amnesty question. He handwrote his decision minutes before he descended to the seventh floor Cabinet room to speak to the nation.

In a packed room, including the press, the President entered looking somber. He took his seat. Those of us who had worked on the speech knew the decisions on all the other items of recommendation, including the lowering of the price of rice decision from \$22 per one-hundred-pound bag to \$20. We did not know his mind about amnesty. It was only toward the very end of his rather long statement that he spoke to the amnesty question. There was applause, but it was not intense. You could sense mental reservations in the room. In fact, my video recording copy makes clearer those mental reservations, as seen in the facial expressions. When announced on the radio and TV that very evening, and with visual images of Matthews and his colleagues being escorted out of the National Security Agency building on June 27, 1979, there was a relaxation of tension and a general sense that the first goodwill action had been taken to enable the hard work of moving forward with reforming Liberia. At least so thought a majority of reform-minded officials. The University of Liberia was reopened, the contentious price of rice was reduced, a code of conduct for public officials was to be formulated, and then the release of political prisoners, all by the stroke of a pen. What would come next as Liberia struggled to change an old country steeped in its ways was anybody's guess.

Now was the time to attempt to contextualize the events of April 14 and to draw meaning therefrom. The President prefaced his highlighting of the Brownell Commission report:

Only a few hours following presentation of the Report and before I could myself read it, let alone carry out the necessary consultation ... and despite indication I had made to the commission that the report was confidential until such time as government would make a determination, I was informed that the BBC had broadcast some of the recommendations. When the irregularity and impropriety of the premature release was raised, Counselor Brownell denied that the commission was responsible. Despite all, I decided to drop the matter and give the report consideration on its merit.

Tolbert went on to accept a number of the important recommendations of the report thus officially releasing the report to the public as promised. But the



central statement of his address on that historic day and the one that made the headlines was this:

Recommendation: "The people have suggested that the members of the Cabinet and other officials who through their official conduct directly or indirectly contributed to the events of April 14, especially the Director of Police and the Ministers of Justice, Agriculture, Defense and Finance, stand indicted in the public eye. To restore full credibility to the Executive Government, the commission recommends that their official conduct in relation to the causes leading to April 14 be investigated."

Later, three ministers would themselves resign, while the Defense Minister was removed but then made Minister for National Security in the President's office. The Director of Police remained in place.

Tolbert continued, speaking directly to the issue of amnesty:

Notwithstanding the immense magnitude of the crime for which those now being detained have been charged, true to the unique character of Liberia, and wishing to provide a suitably conducive atmosphere for national reconstruction spiritually and physically in this our beloved Country, well known and highly respected for her maturity, stability and peace, by authority vested in me, and in the Monrovia spirit of reconciliation, I do now proclaim that I have granted and hereby do grant General Amnesty to all those persons in whatever manner directly or indirectly involved in or responsible for the April 14 Civil Disturbance and accordingly, all those charged with the crime of treason and others arrested and detained in connection therewith, are hereby released from further detention without bail, and permitted to enjoy their full liberty and freedom without hindrance, in common with all other citizens of Liberia. It is now expected that imbued with a sense of national consciousness, they will fully realize and be sensitive to their duty, obligation and responsibility to their native land, and as honest, loyal and patriotic citizens will remain law-abiding and join forces with government and their fellow citizens, and with togetherness and in love, harmony and concord and unity, construct for ourselves and posterity a strong and great nation.

May Almighty God strengthen our hands in this gigantic and noble enterprise!!

Restrained euphoria, disgust, hope, and fears mingled to characterize the public reaction to amnesty, and likely other acceptances by government of the

Brownell Commission recommendations. Tolbert was, in all of this, not the only one of the players to stay the course or remain committed to change. So did the social movements of PAL and MOJA, as well as the regime's old guard in terms of retaining its stance. In this sense, nothing changed. Though Tolbert had relented in his inclination to meet most of the demands of the dissidents who led or sympathized with the demonstration, he felt held back by those opposed to change. In fact, the status quo squad attempted to seize the initiative perhaps by having conversations among themselves about how to remove the president from office. This soon entered the rumor mill. In the short run, they attempted to place their people in strategic places in the government, such as the justice and defense ministries. I overheard the new justice minister utter explosive words. He was speaking in the corridors of the Executive Mansion employing language so unsavory and crude as would instigate a civil war. It suffices to recall Justice Minister Chesson's political pedigree: He had served as attorney general in the Tubman administration in the 1950s when Tubman crushed the independent True Whig Party which led to the death of one of its officials, former Interior Secretary David Coleman and his son, and the imprisonment of a number of prominent men including Counselors S. Raymond Horace and Nete Sie Brownell (later of Brownell Commission fame).

In the midst of this unsettled situation, the much-awaited sixteenth summit conference of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) was convened in Monrovia July 17<sup>th</sup> through the 20<sup>th</sup>, 1979. Liberia had played a leading role in the creation in 1963 of the Pan-African organization and was hosting the annual gathering for the first time. As the host president, Tolbert was elected "Current Chairman" or spokesman for Africa for a year. On a visit to London, he engaged with the key players in the Lancaster House Talks, which led to a negotiated settlement of the Rhodesian conflict. President Tolbert was about to embark on a visit to Zimbabwe to participate in that country's independence celebrations, when he was assassinated.

As Liberia's 132<sup>nd</sup> independence anniversary of July 26, 1979, approached, and in the midst of all that was sweltering around the Executive Mansion – the aftermath of April 14th, and the challenges of his current chairmanship of the OAU that had just concluded its summit in Monrovia – the President asked me to deliver the traditional Independence Day Oration. I had heard many distinguished Liberians speak eloquently on our National Day. Could I measure up, I wondered? But I considered the President's request both an honor and a national duty. I endeavored to do my best. My friend, Byron Tarr, who was now in the private sector, having left government as comptroller general of public corporations, was the first person I sent my draft speech to and requested his critical comments. And Tarr was critical, making helpful comments. I next

asked my boss, Minister Townsend to take a quick look. Townsend was a gifted editor, and his edits improved the quality of the speech.

I spoke on the topic, “Defining the National Purpose of Liberia.” I prefaced my address with a quote from the theologian Reinhold Niehbur’s “Faith for a Hazardous Future,” as I invoked the imperative of change in Liberia. The speech sought to point out two visions or purposes for Liberia: the civilizing and Christianizing ethos or the establishment of a “little America” in nineteenth-century West Africa, and the counter-vision of the Liberian thinker, Edward Wilmot Blyden. Blyden proffered the building in Liberia of an African nationality with foundations rooted in African cultural institutions modified by western thought. The speech suggested that Blyden’s was the more appropriate and that the times called for its embrace. To pursue this path in fulfillment of our national purpose, required, I suggested, that we build together a strong Liberia morally on the basis of greater social justice and equality of opportunities for all Liberians. I ended by exhorting my 1979 audience to appreciate the requirements of the times and be fortified to face the “harzadous future.” The speech was apparently well received. President Tolbert wrote me a warm letter of congratulations, as did a few friends and well-wishers. I was pleasantly surprised when UL President Mary Antoinette Brown Sherman quoted from my 1979 oration as she spoke in 1981 on the occasion of the first anniversary of the 1980 coup dubbed “National Redemption Day.” She was reminding her audience of Liberia’s founding circumstances and the contrasting ethos of building a Black nation on Western ideas versus forging a foundation rooted in African cultural institutions made adaptable to the revelations of science and technology.

Following the Brownell Report, the issue of a Cabinet reshuffle became contentious. Both Agriculture Minister Chenoweth and Finance Minister Phillips had tendered their resignations to Tolbert, but they were not immediately accepted. The issue lingered until an August 1 Cabinet meeting when the President acknowledged the departure of the two ministers. For his part, Justice Minister Oliver Bright maneuvered the President into firing him, not wanting to resign for apparent political reasons. Dr. Cyril Bright replaced Chenoweth at Agriculture, and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf replaced J.T. Phillips at Finance. Tolbert bypassed the senior deputy minister of finance, Gerald Padmore, and chose Sirleaf.

In her substantive response to President Tolbert’s commissioning statement, Sirleaf called the occasion an end and a beginning: an end of 15 years of service in the Treasury Department that had become the Ministry of Finance. She began by thanking Clarence Parker for employing her in 1964 in his embryonic paint company upon her return from studies abroad. She then extolled former Treasury Secretaries Charles Dunbar Sherman and James Milton Weeks, and

late Finance Minister Stephen Allen Tolbert. Sherman's "captivating finesse in negotiation must have left a mark on me," she asserted, while Weeks taught "the nuts and bolts of quality professional work." Steve Tolbert was praised for his "decisiveness, perception and strength," which Sirleaf considered "the bed-rock of management dynamics so startlingly lacking in today's public service." Finance Minister Sirleaf told President Tolbert that the appointment humbled her into brevity.

She continued:

I am humbled because I know that for you this was a hard decision, a bold decision, a departure from the expected and from the advised. I am humbled because in your preferment I deduce a call for efficiency, a yearning for honesty and integrity, a thrust for a new order of financial discipline and responsibility. To these I pledge everything I've got: body, soul, hand, heart. But these will not be enough, I will need your full support and confidence.

Sirleaf ended by renewing her thanks to the President

for this strong manifestation, this visible evidence that in Liberia, one can excel to the top not on the basis of who you are, not on the basis of your name, not from where you came, but from what you can do.

One of President Tolbert's greatest challenges in his quest to reform Liberia in the aftermath of April 14th was dealing with the True Whig Party. A pillar of the hegemonic regime Tolbert inherited, the TWP was a bastion of the old guard. Guinea's President Touré had spoken and written to Tolbert about the need to make the TWP relevant to the changing times. Although Tolbert did not devote much of his time to the minute details of party matters, he appreciated the need for party reform, as the following dramatic incident demonstrates; he was willing to confront, even humiliate, the party and its chairman. The incident involved James Daniel Anderson, the son of TWP's chairman, James N. Anderson. The younger Anderson, himself head of the Maryland County TWP, had been convicted of murder. Along with eleven others, Anderson reportedly committed murder for ritualistic political purposes. Ultimately, Anderson was sentenced to death.

As deputy minister at the Mansion, I was present at the meeting when Tolbert signed the actual death warrant. I had been summoned to bring an item, possibly the seal used when death warrants were signed. I recall the presence of the party chairman, James N. Anderson himself, as well as T. Siafa Sherman, acting

foreign minister. What happened next seemed bizarre to me. President Tolbert asked us to bow in prayer. All of us, including Chairman Anderson, bowed our heads as Tolbert led in prayer. After the prayers, the President proceeded to sign the warrant. I don't recall what came next. James Daniel Anderson, however, was executed on February 16, 1979.

In protest, James N. Anderson resigned his position as chairman of the TWP. I witnessed Anderson's dramatic resignation at the party's headquarters, the E.J. Roye Building. As he left the podium in the auditorium, Anderson and two of his children locked arms as they strolled majestically out of the room. Decades later, I found a letter from Anderson to his bishop, Episcopal Bishop George Browne. Reflecting a father's agony, the sad letter of March 2, 1979, rejected the allegation that Anderson's son had been involved in the killings. Anderson wrote:

Dear Bishop Browne,

There is a pernicious rumour spreading in Monrovia that my late son James Daniel Anderson, prior to his death, confessed to you his participation in the crime for which he suffered the death penalty. Information has reached me that minister Oliver Bright stated that it was you who gave him the information. If this is a fact, the glowing tribute that you spontaneously paid my late son in which you classified him as a 'Hero' at the requiem Mass held in Cape Palmas immediately after his demise on February 16. of this year, does not indicate synchronism. In view of the foregoing I shall be greatly obliged if and when you are satisfied that minister Oliver Bright did make the statement, you will kindly make a pronouncement for the benefit of the public whether this assertion of minister Oliver Bright is true or not wherever and whenever you have the occasion to do so which I feel certain will assist in curbing the lies that are, even now being told on a dead man by a so-called Minister of Justice. You have the liberty if you so desire to make use of this letter. Signed, James N. Anderson.

Minister of State Townsend, a strong establishment figure, soon succeeded Anderson as acting party chairman and subsequently sought to make the party more visible politically. As earlier indicated, the TWP was also an instrument of governance and an integral if quaint part of the patronage that went with governing in Liberia. It needed an overhaul if serious reform was to happen. Since governance rejuvenation was in the air, Tolbert invited to Bentol on October 13, 1979, a number of young and not so young Liberians from what was for him, many walks of life. I was among the invited. An outcome of that meeting was

the Party's Standard Bearer, President Tolbert's appointment of a Special Task Force on Party Reform. The 27 members were: Emmanuel Shaw II (Chair), Hilary B. Wilson, Sr. (Vice Chair). Mohamedu Fahnbulleh Jones (Secretary), Emily David Bruce (Asst. Secretary), Jennie Johnson Bernard, George S. Boley, J. Emmanuel Bowier, Benjamin Toe Collins, Edward A. David, William R. Davies, Jr., Ernest E. Dennis, William E. Dennis, Jr., Sadie L. Deshield, D. Elwood Dunn, Joseph W. Garber, III, Arbella Greaves, Christiana Harmond (Tah), Lawrence Kennedy, Alfred Kulah, Victoria Ricks-Marsh, Randall A. Kpokpo, Weah McClain, Peter Naigow, Thelma Nelson, Christine Tolbert Norman, J. Montgomery Scott, R. Archibald Williams, and T. Nelson Williams, Sr.

These 27 Liberians were largely young professionals supposedly in tune with the tempo of societal change. They were of a disparate background socially and were all coming together perhaps for the first time to deliberate on a national issue: the future of the hegemonic TWP. Chairman Shaw was a junior government official, as were a large number of others, including me. Mohamedu Jones and Emmanuel Bowier were party bureaucrats. Boley was an assistant education minister, who also associated subsequently with the newly registered PPP in January 1980. Jennie Bernard was a public health official and elder sister of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. Christine Tolbert Norman was a daughter of the President. Edward David, Ernest Dennis, Sadie DeShield, and Randall McClain were also related to the President. Because my participation in the deliberations was limited due to constraints on my time (at the Mansion and the aftermath of the Brownell Commission), I missed the opportunity of observing the dynamics of the group, as they framed and discussed the issues. Many decades later, Jones told of how some in the group harbored suspicion about my membership and that of the President's daughter.

The Task Force report was submitted on October 24, 1979, to the First Quadrennial Congress of the TWP in Lower Buchanan, Grand Bassa County. Major recommendations included a restructuring of the Party's Secretariat, a change of personnel then occupying certain party positions, a re-vamping of Party elections procedures, and a more highly visible and helpful Party. It included as well an ominous conclusion:

This first Congress, if it can find the wisdom and the courage, can catapult a re-vitalized True Whig Party confidently into the turbulence and uncertainties of the 80s as an enlightened, united, democratic party of the people, Or, if narrow-mindedness and short-sightedness prevail, the First Congress might well go down in history as the Party's last. We hope and trust that this latter course will be avoided at all cost – for the good of the Party and the prosperity of the Republic.

Soon the ongoing struggle between the old TWP and a new party striving to be born was engaged. Tragically, the changes made were largely cosmetic. Below the standard bearer, President Tolbert, there stood at the apex of the party National Chairman E. Reginald Townsend and Secretary General C. L. Simpson, Jr. The “enlightened, united, democratic party of the people” did not emerge. Instead, it seemed that conservative forces were regrouping in a regime attempting to pursue a reform agenda.

A three-way struggle involving advocates of radical change, the old guard, and the administration was by now evident, and was played out in a meeting on October 29<sup>th</sup>. Before highlighting the meeting, it may be useful to clarify terms employed explicitly or by implications in this memoir: conservative and progressive. I use “conservative” to mean those with a tendency towards maintaining the status quo, building upon the Tubman legacy, affirming the myth that the pillars of Liberian society were the state, the church, the ruling True Whig Party, and the Masonic Craft. The term “progressive” has carried different connotations depending on the context used. There were progressive elements both in opposition and inside the government. There were progressive indigenes and repatriates (as there were conservatives). The social movements of MOJA and PAL have been widely labeled “the progressives,” but there were change agents outside these organizations in other niches of society, including the government. Progressive, broadly conceived then, combined the pan-Africanist thinking of an Edward Wilmot Blyden with the practical imperatives of hastening social justice and inclusive governance in Liberia. Some would apply the label to President Tolbert himself, nevermind his governance challenges.

So, Tolbert convened the second October gathering in response to continuing social tension, especially strikes by workers in the various foreign concession areas, the campaign of UL Professor Amos Sawyer to become mayor of Monrovia, and opposition pronouncements from MOJA and PAL social movements. The government’s response to these developments was ambiguous. While the President maintained his reconciliatory approach to dissent, the security forces under Justice Minister Chesson adopted a posture of suppression. It was like Tubman security forces operating in a Tolbert government, or the use of Tubman era tactics in the Tolbert administration. In fact, as we have seen, Minister Chesson was once Tubman’s attorney general and the country’s chief security officer. Some of the issues included postponement of mayoral elections in order to sort out and harmonize constitutional issues regarding voters’ qualifications. While these issues, some more general, others more specific, dominated the explicit agenda, the deeper issue was the three-way



struggle involving the conservative old guard, the younger generation of progressives, and the Tolbert presidency.

The October meeting was convened by the President who wanted another “come let us reason together” gathering. Present here were: Vice President Warner, Speaker Henries, TWP acting Chairman and Minister of State Townsend, new Minister of Justice Chesson, Minister of National Security Holder, Archbishop Yekorogba of a Pentecostal Church, Episcopal Bishop Browne, Lutheran Bishop Roland Payne, Roman Catholic Bishop Michael Francis, Bishop Alfred Reeves, Providence Baptist Pastor E. Toimu Reeves, the Rev. Dr. Advertus Hoff, Dr. Tipoteh, Dr. Sawyer, Dew Mayson, Bacchus Matthews, and three associates.

Tolbert indicated that the meeting was called because, despite his efforts since April 14 and its aftermath to bring about an atmosphere of national reconstruction so that a united people might pursue development of the country, some seemed not on board, as evidenced by the behavior of social movement actors such as Tipoteh, Sawyer, Mayson, and Matthews. Tolbert chided them for inciting workers, issuing threats about meeting force with force. Tolbert said he was calling the meeting of prelates, and high government officials, and other parties present in hopes such detrimental acts would stop. “I have four more years in office,” the President went on, “and I will preserve the country within this period.” He then admonished the four individuals to stop now, notwithstanding the freedom of expression.

Tipoteh complained that he and his colleagues were assailed over national radio as the purveyors of socialism. He pointed instead to the Russian presence in Monrovia and its embassy’s contributions of books to the schools that really posed the problem of “different ideology.” Regarding the Sawyer mayoral campaign, he expressed the view that the rule of fair play in our laws could minimize the tension considerably.

Sawyer disagreed with the President’s strategy. He thought the preservation of our state was not the same as the preservation of the institutions within the state. It was incomplete to talk about unity and economy in a vacuum. He called our electoral system a one-way traffic. He cited the issue of the Election Commission’s requirement of deeds and property, or the property clause problem in the elections laws that require demonstration through a show of land deeds and other property qualifications for voting. Sawyer saw selective application of the law citing the presidential election of 1975 and the vice-presidential election of 1977, versus the then pending 1979 mayoral election.

Matthews resented the continuous press onslaught against his group and harassment of his supporters by security forces. Bishop Browne acknowledged his membership in MOJA and advisory to Susukuu, offering his services in any

way possible to resolve problems but not to override the remarks of Sawyer and Matthews. Bishop Francis spoke to credibility issues. Why the injection of property requirement for election, when this was not an issue in the past? For the sake of peace and harmony, the bishop said, Tolbert should forego all the requirements and let the people vote.

Then came the rebuttal by members of the old guard. However, as will be seen in the following conversations, some members of the establishment expressed sympathy, even support for the progressives of the social movements. The Vice President said that the President was aware of the electoral system and the property requirement, but this was a constitutional issue. He informed the gathering that Tolbert had asked the legislature to remove the property clause, and that the House had acted, but that the Senate raised questions of open borders with ECOWAS free movement of people and the likelihood that non-Liberians could be voting. Countering Warner, Rev. Reeves focused on the young people and the need to listen to them. They were not socialists, he said; they simply wanted their voices heard.

A prominent pillar of the establishment, Speaker Henries started on a personal note, deepening the perception of his role in conserving the old system. He said that he knew all presidents of Liberia from Daniel E. Howard to Tolbert and that he had worked for the government since the C.D.B. King administration. He saw Tolbert as the president that was most open to dialogue with citizens. Tolbert introduced the idea of building together a new Liberia. The speaker said that he had been in the True Whig Party for 50 years, serving as legal advisor for 32 years. Henries said Sawyer had nothing to complain about. He would eventually have the right to run for mayor, and Tolbert had promised to look into things. Henries went on to promise that the legislature would look into the matter at hand, and that there would be a referendum to consummate things. Then the Speaker said that, if the President violated the Constitution by removing the property clause, he would be impeached and removed from office. I wish I had been there to gauge the reactions in the room. Alas, this account comes from the minutes I acquired.

President Tolbert concluded the meeting by saying that he had convened the gathering because he was the chief critic of the country. By this he meant that he was always reviewing things in quest of improvement in the interest of all Liberians. He thought the gathering had brought about a meeting of minds. Since 1975, he had had the urge to remove the property clause. Toward this end, he approached the legislature as the Vice President had indicated his wishes. To do things properly, he decided to suspend the mayoral election to give ample time to set things straight. He presumed that after the Legislature met in January 1980 they would pass the bill to remove the property clause, that a

referendum would follow, and then voter registration would proceed. A proclamation would be issued to this effect. Tolbert went on to say that in keeping with An Act Regulating the Time of Election of City Mayors Throughout the Republic, approved August 9, 1979, he had issued a proclamation

postponing for a period of seven months all Mayoral Elections due to be held in Liberia on the second Tuesday of November 1979 to the second Tuesday of June A.D. 1980, so as to provide broader participation of the people of Liberia in the electoral process.

Where was Liberia headed in all of these discussions? The goals of the government critics remained unchanged. Sawyer wanted to be mayor in order to challenge TWP hegemony. PAL wanted to become a political party for a similar reason. President Tolbert was a change advocate but did not quite know what to do with the old guard represented by Speaker Henries, his brother the President Pro-Tempore of the Senate, and others with whom he had exercised political power for decades. A struggle between the old and a different Liberia, the contours of which were unclear seemed evident.

#### 4      **Appointment Minister of State for Presidential Affairs**

In October of 1979, I accompanied President Tolbert to my hometown of Lower Buchanan, Grand Bassa County, for the Congress of the True Whig Party. Even though earlier I had been recruited to give a televised address to the nation on the eve of the endorsement of the election of Vice President Warner, I was only a nominal member of the party. In fact, I had never voted in my country, not even in the 1975 election of Tolbert, which I chose to skip, because I did not get the point of voting when there was no competition. I did not vote either in the 1977 election of Vice President Warner. Furthermore, I did not normally travel with the President as deputy minister of state for Cabinet affairs. I was here primarily as a member of the TWP Task Force on Party Reform. But here now I was supposedly in the thicket of TWP politicking in Buchanan, when I was privy to absolutely nothing going on behind the scenes. I only considered myself a reformer in the Tolbert administration trying to join other reformers to carry Liberia forward. I had not even read the final of our Task Force report, as I had attended only the organizing meeting and the concluding meeting. I recall being called a turncoat at one of the meetings, and I was told decades later that some on the taskforce, given my position at the Executive Mansion, viewed me with suspicion.

At the Congress' venue, I learned that my immediate supervisor at the Mansion, Presidential Affairs Minister E. Reginald Townsend, who was already serving as a part-time chairman of the party, would be made full-time chairman, though this had not yet been announced. Also, while at the party meeting, President Tolbert called me onto the stage and held my hands for a long time as I sat beside him. I actually wondered what that meant. Was he anointing me for something? Did he want the audience in my hometown to see how close I was to the President of the Republic? My fellow Bassonian, Statesman G. Flamma Sherman, told me or reminded me that there was no one from Grand Bassa County in the Cabinet and that Tolbert could not appoint a relative (then my senior colleague deputy minister in the Mansion) to succeed Townsend. Sherman said that the President had no choice but to call on me to replace Townsend. At any rate the Congress ended, and we returned to Monrovia.

I believe it was a weekend when the President sent for me at his Bentol home. I went, as was usual, with my notepad to record instructions. If my memory serves me right, Foreign Minister Dennis, Labor Minister Bernard, and National Security Minister Holder were also there. I was asked to wait in a nearby holding room as the President apparently consulted with these ministers and possibly others. When they were done, the President informed me of his decision to appoint me to succeed Minister Townsend. I thanked him and pledged to do my best, as the others congratulated me. I took leave and went home, where I then broke the news to Matilda, my wife. She was elated.

As the new week began, I received the formal letter of appointment from the President, in which he said that with Townsend elected TWP chairman, and "impressed by your dedicated services and by your loyal, faithful and efficient performance of your duties as Deputy Minister of State," he was pleased to appoint me to the portfolio of Minister of State for Presidential Affairs. I replied the same day thanking the President and pledging to do my best to justify the confidence. He wrote the word "thanks" after reading my letter. The die was cast. I had become a full member of the President's Cabinet and thus a senior official of the administration. My predecessor was among the first to send a congratulatory letter. In it, he pointed out that mine was "an excellent opportunity, for in serving our President in a close, intimate and cheerful manner, you are simultaneously called upon to render greater service to our nation and people and to the extended family of man." And then he added: "Ours has been a warm, sincere personal friendship and a happy relationship. Let us keep it that way; and remember that I am as close to you as your telephone, if ever you need me." Other such messages would follow, but first came the formal installation.

On November 30, 1979, I was “qualified” or installed by the President in the Parlors of the Executive Mansion along with my fellow Bassaonian, Honorable Johnny McClain, who had recently been appointed Minister of Information, Cultural Affairs and Tourism, succeeding Minister Jenkins Peal who had resigned. Grand Bassa County now had two sons in the Cabinet. This was a special day for me. State Protocol had invited relatives and friends, and the Cabinet and legislative and judicial leaders were all present. The President administered the oath of office to me, to Information Minister McClain, to my successor as deputy minister, Honorable David Dueh Chieh, and to deputy information ministers Peter Naigow, Bai T. Moore, and Momo Rogers.

As was traditional, I then made remarks on behalf of Hon. Chieh and me. I genuinely felt both humility and honor as I took the podium, sincerely thanking the President for the appointment, but also making nods to Foreign Minister C. Cecil Dennis and Minister of State E. Reginald Townsend, who had been my supervisors since I joined the administration in 1974.

I also actually choked as I invoked the sacred memories of my maternal grandparents: Mary A. Mason, my grandmother, and Thomas A. Mason, my grandfather, who I said were responsible for molding my character and thus preparing me for that day of honor. Minister of Planning and Economic Affairs David Neal came to me after the ceremony to congratulate me and to say how he felt personally that I had spoken “from the heart.” I also thanked my father and mother who were in the audience for their contributions to my development. I thanked my wife for her support and continuing understanding, since we were joined in matrimony nine years earlier. I finally reserved a special place for my many friends and well-wishers, who had deluged me with messages upon learning about my appointment. To them I said that my only hope and prayer was that in the faithful and loyal discharge of my duties I would meet their respective legitimate and honorable expectations of me.

A wave of congratulations came from a wide range of individuals largely at home though a few came from abroad as well. Former officials of government such as former Secretary of State J. Rudolph Grimes, former Commerce Secretary Romeo Horton, former Justice Minister Oliver Bright, Mayor of Paynesville Viola Brown, Assistant Foreign Minister for Afro-Asian Affairs Christopher Minikon, Grand Cape Mount Senator Augustus F. Caine, and Mano River Union Secretary General Ernest Eastman were generous in their congratulatory messages.

As Secretary of Education in 1965, Dr. Caine was instrumental in my quest for a scholarship to study abroad. He later approved my request to transfer from France to the US to pursue a master’s degree in International Relations. He also approved the recommendation of the Student Advisor and Education

Attaché at the Liberian Embassy in Washington that I continue my studies through the doctoral level. He now wrote:

I have followed your career with interest, both at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Executive Mansion. Your high professional qualification, your dedication to duty, and your humility are attributes which were bound to identify you for preferment.

Caine concluded:

I know you will contribute dynamically to providing the high quality leadership which we the people of Liberia have come to expect from the Executive Mansion in the Tolbert years.

For his part, Ambassador Eastman was equally generous in his letter to me. Eastman was under secretary of state in 1965 and played an important enabling role in my acquisition of a French government scholarship to study in France. Now, many years later, he was joining many others in congratulating me. Eastman added:

Yours is indeed, a remarkable achievement, reached over a relatively brief period. In a very large sense, it discloses the high confidence in which you are held by the President, your intellectual ability and the practical way you have gone about your office and your work.

A number of other friends and wellwishers honored me with their kind words. They included Harry Tah Freeman (a former Foreign Ministry colleague), Carlton Karpeh (later a diplomat and minister of information), Jorina Julu (a school principal), and Cerue Henderson, mother of my friend and spiritual mentor Burgess Carr.

Henderson's letter touched me profoundly. Signing as "bigsister," she likened me and my life's journey to her Episcopal clergy son, Rev. Canon Burgess Carr (1935–2013), as she wrote:

When I see you, I am reminded so vividly of my own Burgess Carr who has come up through and under real hard and dreary conditions, yet you have remained constant and full of ambition and determination. The low and humble condition from which you have come have made you a better man and to God we give praise.

She congratulated me for the high position to which I had been appointed. She placed me in prayer under God's almighty wings and counseled me not to lose touch with the common man, not to take too much for granted, and to pray always.

Foreign envoys accredited to Monrovia were also generous in their commendatory letters. Moroccan Ambassador Saad Eddine, Nigerian Ambassador E. Martins, British Ambassador J.G. Doubleday, Cameroonian Ambassador Henry Fossung (a schoolmate at American University's graduate school and a dear friend) were among those I heard from. I also received a special letter from French Ambassador Louis Dollot, written in French. Quite apart from the fact that we had become friends since my foreign ministry days, he wanted to express pride in the fact that I had benefitted from a French government scholarship to study in France and spoke French fluently (*"et parle couramment le français"*). Dollot's encomium:

Mr. Minister and dear friend,

It pleases me enormously to congratulate you on your nomination to the important position of Minister of State for Presidential Affairs. This promotion, which has not surprised me, represents the high esteem in which you are held by the President of the Republic of Liberia. While deeply regretting the departure of Mr. Reginald Townsend, I am heartened that his successor, a quality diplomat who has received a part of his education in France and speaks French fluently. There is no doubt that given the news and the high responsibilities that are yours, our relationship can only intensify. *Je vous prie de croire, Monsieur le Ministre et cher ami, à l'assurance de ma haute considération et de mes sentiments les plus sympathiques.*

Two letters of congratulations came from abroad: the American industrialist Garland Farmer (closely associated with Liberian governments since the Tubman era), and Dr. Tibor Rosenbaum (a Swiss industrialist and close friend of the Tolbert family).

Of special importance for me were three letters from youth groups. They came from Sam Natt, Jr. of the Liberian National Democratic Youth League, Kowee Saywayne, Jr. of the Liberia Agriculture Company Youth Association, and the president of the Liberia National Students Union (LINSU) W. Conmany Wesseh (now a Senator from River Gee County). Copying his letter to me to President Tolbert, Wesseh wrote:



We are deeply heartened by your appointment because for us it is a source of hope for the future and leads us to developing confidence in the fact that efficient, honest, simple and hardworking people can work in the Liberian government. We have followed your growth in government with pride." He continued: "As a note from a friend, let us advice that today, there is talk of 'tension in the society.' This seems an exaggeration because those who see the interaction of normal forces and call it 'tension' are not realizing that Liberia is going through a change and they must be prepared to help shape that change or they will be forced in line or dropped on the way side." Wesseh added: "The shaping of the change – the direction of the New Liberia – cannot be done by people who get excited over every pin drop. It takes men of courage and vision; men whose personal interests are subordinated to those of the people; men who agree and implement when policies are good and disagree and make an honest effort at influencing a change when the policies are found to be bad." He concluded: "Our experience of your work style and handling of hot issues impresses us and gives us hope that there will be another one added to the better and honest advisors to the Chief Executive. We are certain that President Tolbert and the Liberian People will respect you if you maintain this quality. The people and students of this country are watching you. Please do not fail us. (Letter of Nov. 6, 1979)

Would I have been able to meet all legitimate and honorable expectations had we not been overthrown? Was my relatively short tenure of six months helpful? One purpose for attempting this memoir is that I felt obligated to account for even that short tenure of service, though I appreciate the fact that it is the judgment of history that will ultimately matter.

I first began my work at the Executive Mansion by addressing staff and organizational matters. Joseph Sogbah Morris (1954–2001), a young economics graduate of the University of Liberia had been serving as a research assistant while I was deputy minister. Smart and intellectually engaging, I found that our worldviews were compatible, as we shared in common an understanding of the reform agenda of the Tolbert administration. Upon my nomination as minister, Joe had written to me a warm letter that accurately summarized that we were on the same wavelength:

Permit me and the members of your office staff to lead the chorus of congratulations and much deserved praises which will expectedly and surely inundate your desk over the next few weeks. As an extension of you, I am sure that you doubtless will understand my pride, and above

all, the satisfaction I enjoy from the fact that you have been given an opportunity to exemplify, as you have always done, those rare qualities of patriotism, commitment, integrity and balanced judgment which the President desires at this crucial period in our history. As I absolutely have no misgivings about your performance, I want you to know that all the blessings and prayers that people have continually showered on us in the past, will serve as a defending shield to all odds which may stray in your path. Always rest assured of my continued support in every way as you journey successfully in your well chosen career.

As my research assistant, Joe was all I had in terms of a substantive assistant. I should add that we benefitted from the services of then UL student Takunboh Lawrence (now a pastor) who was a cadet in my office for probably a year. The other people in my deputy office were typists and logistics workers. Naturally, I brought Joe with me to the office of minister of state, but before we could settle on issues of rank and pay, the President appointed Marie Leigh Parker and Valarie Morris (no relations to Joe) as assistant ministers and had me commission them. Valarie's responsibilities were not directly under my office, but Marie's were. Though I had met Marie in our freshman class at the University of Liberia in 1961, I had not followed her career. She did, however, prove to be a good administrator, as we attempted to get a handle on how the President's office functioned. But her insertion into the office so soon after my appointment and before I could myself think through staffing issues created a challenge. I was bringing Joe from my deputy office as an administrative assistant, not at the level of an assistant minister.

I should add here that though my predecessor had a special assistant in the person of Max Dennis, Max retained the status of an assistant minister but responsibilities were shifted to presidential speech drafting through the offices of Deputy Minister Weseh McClain and Press Secretary Henry B. Cole. I still carry among my papers a note addressed to Minister McClain that reads interestingly:

Minister McClain,

Below are some notes gathered from reading through the draft for the [President's] New Year Message from the Foreign Minister, as well as my own thoughts. I suggest that the message be made as brief and direct as possible. Attempt should not be made to recount events of 1979, judgmentally good or bad, but rather to quickly review highlights, draw from them some meaning and relate same to the fundamental policies of the Administration. Refrain from saying too much, but act steadily to fully

restore confidence, I believe, is the way to end 1979 and begin 1980 ... Let us say only what we are programmed to implement, preferably in the short run. In the same breath that we underscore the primacy of the security of the State, let us also make meaningful mention of government's unwavering commitment to the people and their genuine interests ... Let us refrain from any direct reference to April 14. Thanking Guinea and others in connection therewith would be politically unwise. If we must extend thanks to other states, let us do so in a very general way by referring to African solidarity made manifest and international cooperation.

As I began my responsibilities as minister of state, I needed my small staff of a substantive assistant with whom I could bounce off ideas and share the agony of political office. That group came to consist of Joe Morris, Marie Parker, Francis Passsawe (my secretary and confidant), an executive secretary, and other logistics workers. But given the close working relationship with Joe, cultivated when we were in the deputy office, he was momentarily unhappy, as he witnessed the politics of personnel that the presence of Mrs. Parker and Ms. Valarie Morris came to represent. He did not hesitate to express his displeasure. We had a serious conversation, after which he wrote to me the day following my formal installation as minister.

Joe began: "Permit me to express my sincere thanks for the very frank and honest exchange which you have constantly advocated and which has undoubtedly characterized our working relationship here at the Executive Mansion." He continued; "Quite candidly, I would not be in good conscience to continue with the high morale which is required at the beginning of your tenure, if I fail to express to you my feelings, expectations and views on a few issues. Prior to my association with the Mansion, there were several options available to me ... However, because I had been closely following your activities and was impressed as well as convinced that you and I share similar views on a number of important issues, and willing to learn from your vast experiences which I have doubtless benefited from during my brief but memorable days, I nevertheless decided to associate with your staff." He continued:

For one who has left University as a student leader, theorizing and experimenting with ushering in a utopian society, it was no small decision to continue in the employ of the Power machinery without disparaging remarks from one's associates who brand you and plaster labels of opportunism on your good name, despite your honest attempts to explain concepts and practices of Government almost completely unfamiliar to them. Moreover,

the countless nerve-breaking and restless hours which become a part of one's daily life, cannot be encouraged and promoted in an atmosphere characterized by Ceremonial Commitment in an area which required the best of its constituent working staff.

Joe concluded:

I thought to express to you the above in order to comment on our discussion last evening relative to the reorganization here at the Executive Mansion. Obviously, the decisions to be made are political in nature and are the prerogatives of the President and his advisors. I personally have no quarrels about any decisions to be made, but I would be very much interested were you to kindly inform me of reasons leading to your personal decision in the premises.

I believe we were able eventually to make suitable adjustments. Without fanfare, Joe became an administrative assistant in my office at the level of an assistant minister. We worked closely together on policy matters bringing together ideas that went into memos, draft speeches, and other documents. He became my special assistant for all practical purposes. Mrs. Parker was the point person on matters touching organization and human resource, the support staff to the President. The rest of the vast Executive Mansion staff was there. The Executive Law of 1972 provided for a minister of state for presidential affairs as a Cabinet member and "Principal Assistant to the President" charged with following "through and coordinating all decisions of the Chief Executive." The minister of state without portfolio was also a Cabinet member and charged with duties assigned by the President. Minister Charles A. Clarke held this portfolio and principally handled matters arising from the finance ministry, the planning ministry, and the commerce and industry ministry. A new attachment to the President's office was that of the ministry for national security, headed by former Defense Minister M. Burleigh Holder, with long-time security professional, Wilfred Clarke as deputy for operations in this new ministry.

Within this vast and complex structure, I was then engaged in a work in progress, feeling my way and attempting to get a handle on the immediate support staff to the President. I was fully aware that we were inheriting a bureaucratic arrangement that had been established by former President Tubman, one that no matter the developing sophistication, rested solely on the person of William V.S. Tubman. He was used to calling upon his "clerks" and dictating letters and

instructions. Townsend, who was once press secretary to Tubman and later his Secretary of Information, once told me that something once annoyed Tubman at a Cabinet meeting and that led him to say to the whole Cabinet that he could run the government with “one solitary clerk” and do without them. This highly personalized mindset was bequeathed to the Tolbert administration.

Tolbert obviously operated with a different style, and thus appointed Townsend as his first minister of state (appellation changed from “Department” to “Ministry” and from “Secretary” to “Minister”), moving away from the American usage and following the usage in fellow African countries. The hope was that Townsend would lead a modernizing bureaucracy at the Executive Mansion, but Townsend was a cautious man and understood that though he was a minister, he was a minister in the President’s office. In fact, he sat in an office space adjacent to the President’s office. His coordination thrust was loose, as he tended to focus on big issues and crisis situations, leaving deputy and assistant ministers to function as they willed, freely moving in and out of the President’s office. Consequently, any coordination of “decisions of the Chief Executive” was quite loose.

When I came in, I was curious and wanted to first study what I had inherited. Thus, it was that I initiated the effort to find out how the President was being served and who was doing what, when, how, and why. Regretably, our efforts were aborted by the coup.

Initially, I sensed no radical change in terms of what I was doing as I had previously acted quite often in Minister Townsend’s stead during his absence, but more importantly, as he began to arrive late at the office, at times after the President was already in his office. As mentioned earlier, Townsend had been demoralized when Tolbert placed him on a list of vice-presidential hopefuls following the death in early 1977 of Vice President James Edward Greene. After being made minister of state at the beginning of the Tolbert administration, Townsend moved from his Marshall residence 30 miles from Monrovia to his apartment building in Congo Town for ease of access to the new President’s call. Reflecting his disappointment, he moved back to Marshall after Bennie Warner was chosen as vice president.

When Townsend was minister of state and I was still a deputy minister, President Tolbert had the habit of calling Townsend from his Bentol residence to ascertain whether there were urgent cable messages or other matters that required his immediate attention. When he called the minister’s office and could not reach him, he would ask for me. I then had to rush from my seventh floor office down to Townsend’s office on the fourth floor to examine the folder with the cables and other urgent messages before calling back to brief the President and receive directives from him. Soon Tolbert may have sensed

what was happening as he began calling my office in the first instance. So, upon my early arrival in office – and I tended to be among the first to arrive – I would first check for the cable file and hold myself in readiness for the call from Bentol. Once I was done, and Townsend had arrived from his Marshall home, I would go to his office to brief him. And this is how we functioned for much of 1978 through 1979. So, we remained in this organizational mode as I took the portfolio of minister of state into early 1980, even as we attempted to handle the multiple crises that were the fallout from the civil disturbance of April 14, 1979.

## 5 Some Policy Issues and Me

I accelerated my activities while still a deputy minister post-April 14<sup>th</sup>, though I was not yet privy to much of the goings-on at the Executive Mansion (EM). The elevator operator would occasionally say to me that there was this or that meeting last night with certain officials and others present, “but I did not see you, minister!” My guess is that the President was consulting with a wide range of people and did not consider that what he acquired was necessarily germane to the work of his office chief of staff. What I then sought to focus on was to attempt to narrow the gap between public word and public deed, literally invoking the TWP’s motto of “deeds, not words.”

On July 23, 1979, when still a deputy minister, I wrote a memo to the President as follows:

As I am privileged to be a part of your staff on this day, July 23, 1979, when you begin the remaining four years of your current term of office, I feel impelled to convey to you the ideas and proposals which follow: Exactly three months ago, on April 23, 1979, I gave to you a memo, two pertinent excerpts from which I quote below:

- a. A thorough review of the *structures of implementation* in the Ministries and Agencies of Government with a view to ascertaining whether your policies are in fact being implemented in the spirit intended; whether there is sufficient “feel,” at the highest and lowest echelon alike, for the interest of the people.
- b. The Executive Mansion Staff needs to be reorganized in a way that an official will be kept satisfactorily intelligent about the operations of each Ministry/Agency of Government. The President would thereby be provided information from two vantage points, the Minister or Agency Head on the one hand, and his own staff, on the other.

With reference to (a) above, you may want to give consideration at this time by issuing the necessary directives to the concerned ministries, and act otherwise in your usual discerning manner. As regards the Executive Mansion Staff, and in consideration of your Current Chairmanship of the OAU, I make two proposals: 1, the creation of an OAU chairmanship bureau within the Executive Mansion, and 2, your commissioning of a re-organization plan for the Mansion to be concluded within one month for your consideration. This exercise could contribute significantly to strengthening staff efficiency, and thus strengthen the overall governmental structure of implementation of policy.”

I provided rationale for the OAU chair office in the Mansion, which was to enable the President to stay on top of things on the African agenda, while keeping his eye on the ball domestically, given the as yet unsettled situation post-April 14<sup>th</sup>.

The OAU chair office was never established. Probably the President thought that the Foreign Ministry might handle this responsibility more fruitfully. And the commissioning of a re-organization plan for the Mansion was not in place when I came to the minister’s office, so I assigned Ms. Parker to the task, which she began implementing with gusto, even incurring the suspicion of Mansion security officials, who seemed uncomfortable with our prying into their budget structure.

In the same memo of July 23, I referenced my memo to the President of July 2, 1979, on “Implementation of Decisions made in your statement of June 26, 1979”: the historic amnesty address in reaction to the Brownell Commission Report. I took up two issues: Code of Conduct for Public Officials, and Council of Economic Advisors (CEA) to the President.

On the code of conduct to attend conflict of interest problems involving public officials, the president had asked me to suggest seven names for his consideration. I accordingly suggested the following: Justice Angie Brooks-Randolph, Hon. Edwin O. Fahnbulleh, Bishop Michael Francis, Foreign Minister C. Cecil Dennis, Local Government Minister Edward B. Kesselly, Mrs. Thelma Goll, and Professor Mary Tedi Bryant. He accepted Randolph, Francis, Kesselly, and Dennis from my list and added Lutheran Bishop Roland Payne, Dr. A. Doris Banks Henries (bowing to the powerful Speaker with the inclusion of Mrs. Henries, the Speaker’s wife), and former Secretary of State J. Rudolph Grimes. I found the president’s choice of Grimes, whom he also made chairman of the committee, quite interesting. When Tolbert was vice president and Grimes was secretary of state during the Tubman administration, they had a serious falling out. A cottage industry developed in Liberia during the transition from



Tubman to Tolbert with the name of Grimes at the center of the saga. Briefly, there was no love lost between the two men. Yet, in the moment of national crisis, Tolbert reached out for a credible Liberian to help craft a code of conduct for public officials. I was so pleased with the Grimes appointment that I proceeded immediately to implement Tolbert's decision, preparing appropriate letters for the president's signature, and establishing contact with Dr. Grimes. So, when the job was done and the report submitted and there was silence from the Mansion, Grimes called me in late January 1980 to say that he had begun receiving queries from the media as to whether the report had been submitted. The report had indeed been submitted and the president had asked us to seek reactions from his Cabinet. The members were slow in their reactions, though Finance Minister Ellen Johnson Sirleaf had told me of her acceptance of all of the recommendations, even implying that the committee might have gone further to curb conflict of interests once and for all. My own reaction was in a detailed written memo to the president and tended to parallel Sirleaf's wholesale acceptance. My eye, though, was toward implementation so that, for example, regarding prohibiting government employed doctors, dentists, lawyers, pharmacists, and nurse technicians from private engagement with the professions, while serving as government functionaries, there were issues that needed sorting out if government were to attract some of the best and brightest.

In considering the establishment of the Council of Economic Advisors, I suggested that it would include individuals from the private sector. In this, I was influenced by the critical Parker Commission Report that assessed the state of the economy largely from the vantage point of the private sector. I made a number of observations/recommendations, based on consultation within and outside government. The matter was pending when the 1980 coup d'état occurred.

## 6 Sole Report as Chairman of the Cabinet

President Tolbert left Monrovia February 28, 1980, for an official visit to Nimba County. Before leaving he issued an Executive Notice as follows:

For the duration of my stay from the Capital on a visit to Nimba County, the Honorable D. Elwood Dunn, Minister of State for Presidential Affairs, is hereby authorized and given proper authority to perform such official duties as I would do if physically present at the Capital; such as, the

signing of Warrants, Requisitions and other official documents necessary for the normal operation of Government.

Besides the above, in consultation with the Cabinet, the Minister of State for Presidential Affairs is to make decisions on important matters, administrative and otherwise, as may require immediate action. I will be in constant communication with the Capital during this period by radio and telephone.

This was my mandate.

Before the President's departure, the Progressive Alliance of Liberia (PAL) had legally registered as a full-fledged political party, the Progressive People's Party (PPP). Those in and out of government who regretted this development may have acted in ways to express their displeasure. The new PPP, on the other hand, may have felt that the political mileage acquired since the April 14th disturbance was a trump card that it could use at will to advance its agenda, whatever that agenda may have been. I was aware that I was in charge of an unstable Monrovia and certainly didn't want anything untoward to occur under my watch. I showed up at my desk daily carrying out routine activities, communicating with the president by telephone, and making notes of issues to be reported to the president upon his return from Nimba County.

On the evening of March 3, 1980, around 10 p.m., I received a call from Deputy Minister of National Security for Operations Wilfred Clarke informing me that something was brewing in the vicinity of the Mansion but that all was under control, and he would call back and keep me posted. As my driver had long since gone home, I immediately drove myself to the Mansion to learn the details on the spot. Upon arrival on the grounds of the Mansion I found there Minister Clarke, the Police Director, the Army Chief of Staff, and other security officials. I went to my office on the fourth floor and invited those officials for a briefing on exactly what was transpiring. What I learned was that PPP leader Matthews and a number of his followers were assembled opposite the Ministry of Lands and Mines near the Mansion complaining that they were being harassed by the security forces and that they sought to bring this unacceptable state of affairs to the President's attention. The security officials told me that they were gathering more information and would return to me for an update on the developments. The issue arose of having the PPP dissidents arrested for some violation or the other. I decided to do two things: 1. Call an urgent meeting of the Cabinet (or those I could reach near that midnight hour), and 2. Call and report what was happening to the president following the meeting. A few Cabinet members and the Speaker came to the meeting. We received a briefing from Clarke, which in essence was that the dissidents had

been told that they could not present their grievances to the president, as he was in Nimba County, and would address their concerns upon his return. We were told that the young men involved were cooperative, as they then pledged to leave the streets before dawn, as the public would be alarmed to wake to yet another group in the streets.

In fact, before I left to return home, I was assured they had already dispersed. My job before leaving was to call and inform the President, which I did using the phone on his office desk. I asked Speaker Henriëns and other senior officials, whom I don't recall (the Vice President was then in the US attending a church conference), to wait a while, as I would like them to speak to the President as well. I was able to accomplish all of this, with this little hiccup. The Speaker, upon arriving for the late-night meeting and when alone with me, began to rage, saying that the President was personally responsible for the state of affairs in the country, suggesting that the President would not stop his permissiveness until he "runs this country into the ground, into the ground!" When it was the Speaker's turn to speak to the President, I brought him into the President's office and gave him the phone as I stood by. All I now heard from the Speaker to the President was "Alright Mr. President; okay Mr. President." No sooner had we left the office than he returned to his "run the country into the ground" rage. At any rate I made it back home safely probably past 3 a.m.

The President was back in town and in office on March 5, when I presented him my report. In it I wrote that government operated smoothly in his absence and that, despite a reported PPP-inspired attempt to politically intimidate, public order was retained. I added that I was mentioning the following, since I had regular phone conversations with him:

1. The PPP-inspired attempt at intimidating the population as already reported to you, was timely contained, and as you are expecting, investigations are underway to determine what laws were violated and by whom. To expedite the investigations and to ensure that it is systematically carried out, I respectfully recommend that precise instructions be given the following officials to execute the assignment and report to you in a given time: The Ministers of Justice, Defense, National Security, and the Director of Police;
2. The Minister of Foreign Affairs prepared and sent off cable messages to Messrs. Robert Mugabe, Joshua Nkomo, and the British Premier;
3. The Gambian President transited RIA and Government extended appropriate courtesies;
4. I regret to inform you of the passing into the great beyond of the following citizens, information of which was brought to my attention

and handled in keeping with policy: Mr. Kaarzea Gbarpu of Grand Bassa County (104 years old), Honorable E.O. Fahnbulleh, former Member of the House of Representatives for Cape Mount County (66 years old), Mother Togba Wonnoh of Virginia, Montserrado County (110 years old);

5. I had cause to honor a request of the Defense Minister for two buses to assist with military transport for two days in view of a temporary shortage (correspondence attached);
6. Also attached to this brief report for your information are:
  - a. Correspondence from Telecommunications about apparent attempt to sabotage gas storage tank at Telecommunication Administration building;
  - b. Confidential letter from the SSS;
  - c. Another intelligence report;
  - d. MICAT Release on attempted disturbance of PPP.

President Tolbert read the report as I stood over him, and then he wrote “thanks and congrats” at end of the report, which he handed back to me.

Two days later the PPP leadership called publicly for the resignation of the Tolbert government and its replacement by a coalition of progressive forces. The pronouncement invited a nation-wide strike until the President resigned. For Tolbert, this was the ultimate challenge. Arrests were ordered on treason charges against the PPP’s leadership. In a special message to the legislature, the President indicated: “Intelligence reports reveal that the PPP had designed a plan to execute an armed insurrection with intent to overthrow the duly constituted government of the Republic of Liberia.”

Tolbert’s prescription included carrying out the “full force of the law without mercy.” He continued, “This is the time for extreme rigidity, and, in the supreme interest of the people, no flexibility whatsoever can, or will be exercised by us.” Arrests were made of the PPP leadership including Matthews, Legal Counsel Chea Cheepo, and PPP associate Dr. George Boley, who was then an assistant minister of education in the Tolbert administration. All the gains made, at least from the government’s perspective, since the post-April 14th general amnesty seemed to be wiped away. We were back to square one. This may not have been evident to some of us in government then, but the undercurrents were there tearing at the very fabric of the national polity.

As the President was being politically attacked, I suggested to him that he should not be defending himself alone. After all, it was the entire government that was under assault. I specifically suggested that legislators such as Senator Augustus Feweh Caine of Cape Mount County and other articulate

and credible elected officials be requested to attempt to dialogue with the PPP. I mentioned Caine specifically, because I recalled that when Caine was seeking the Senate seat, his competitor was former University of Liberia President, Dr. Advertus Hoff. I had heard Caine say then that he would easily beat Hoff in part because in a political crisis he would be in a stronger position to influence the people of Cape Mount County and of the country as a whole than Hoff would. Caine complied with President Tolbert's request to engage the PPP. He appeared twice on national TV and even went into the lion's den of the PPP headquarters in Monrovia to attempt dialogue. In the aftermath of the 1980 coup, Senator Caine felt threatened, though he ultimately suffered only house arrest. Somehow Caine learned of my recommendation of him to the President, and many years later spoke his mind to me, insinuating that I had been the source of his post-coup political anxieties. We met in Washington, D.C., decades later and reconciled before he fell ill and subsequently died.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of March 1980, Tolbert addressed the legislature and hewed to a hardline policy-wise. On March 28, the PPP was banned as a political party by an Act of the Legislature. A new wave of arrests followed that included Matthews, Boley, Chea Cheepo, and others. The regime's hardliners were now in a position to say to Tolbert, "I told you so," and Tolbert, under siege, seemed now to be obliging. But he was talking tough but probably not acting tough, or so I observed from where I sat. His orders were still that the rights of the accused be respected pending their day in a court of law. Behind the President's back, however, Justice Minister Chesson, who was former President Tubman's attorney general at the time of the 1955 crisis (Tubman accused former President Edwin Barclay of leading a plot to assassinate him), was leading behavior that was incompatible with respect for the rights of the accused. He would boast in the corridors of the Mansion about "teaching lessons to the PAL boys." Despite the surface calm over Monrovia, political tension reminiscent of the immediate pre-April 14, 1979 days had returned to the country, or at least Monrovia. But this did not seem to impede the day-to-day routine of governance. Nor did it prevent me from making a trip to Zimbabwe in preparation for an official visit by President Tolbert, who was scheduled to attend the country's upcoming independence celebrations.

## 7 Envoy to Zimbabwe

Having hosted the 16<sup>th</sup> summit of the OAU in Liberia in July 1979, Tolbert was serving as the Current Chairman of the pan-African organization. In that capacity he was intimately involved in the Lancaster House Talks that negotiated the

independence of Zimbabwe. Deputy Foreign Minister T. Siafa Sherman was posted to London as Tolbert's ad hoc special representative. So, with the talks successfully concluded, elections held and won by Robert Mugabe's ZANU/PF Party, independence celebrations were slated for April 19, 1980.

The Mansion received a cable message from our embassy in Paris suggesting the appropriateness of the OAU Current Chairman sending an envoy to establish initial contact with the newly elected Zimbabwean Premier and his government. I took the cable message to the President in his office. As he read it, he looked up at me, noting that Foreign Minister Dennis was abroad on a mission, and wondered whom he might send instead. It was not long before he again looked up at me and said to my surprise "I will send you!" He then proceeded to instruct me to begin working on the travel logistics. The Foreign Ministry determined that Assistant Foreign Minister for African-Asian Affairs, Christopher Minikon, would join me on the mission.

Ending the day's work in the presidential office on April 3, 1980, having drafted a letter addressed to Mugabe, which Tolbert signed, I left my fourth floor office and went to the President's living quarters on the eighth floor to bid him goodbye and receive any last instructions. It was a sunny and pleasant afternoon. He had no new instructions. With no fanfare, we shook hands as I took leave of President Tolbert. Little did I know that I would never see him again.

Minikon and I left RIA that evening for Zimbabwe via Nairobi on a Pan-Am flight. Traveling on the same flight was former Secretary of State J. Rudolph Grimes, who was headed to Addis Ababa on an OAU consultative project. Grimes was seated near me and soon struck a conversation that focused on the state of affairs in the country. He was clearly not a fan of President Tolbert. We parted in Nairobi.

Both the Kenyan government and the Liberian Embassy in Nairobi extended courtesies and facilitated our transit through Nairobi. We arrived in Salisbury, Zimbabwe, on April 5, 1980, at about 8:30am. Zimbabwe protocol informed us that the prime minister would receive us at 10:30 a.m., two hours upon our arrival. We arrived at the heavily guarded residence of the prime minister precisely at 10:30 a.m. and were ushered in, meeting Mr. Mugabe in the presence of deputy foreign minister, Dr. Witness Mangwende, and a protocol officer. After briefly explaining the purpose of our mission, the prime minister responded by expressing gratitude for the Liberian gesture, recalled Liberia's solid support for the liberation struggle, underscoring President Tolbert's personal engagements in London during the Lancaster House Talks. I soon delivered President Tolbert's letter to the prime minister. The letter reads in part:

We have followed with interest and a deep sense of involvement the evolution of your valiant struggle for independence, and we here renew our commendation to you, the Patriotic Front and the gallant people of your great nation for the courage, perseverance and supreme sacrifices made to win independence for Zimbabwe. This is why we were so joyful that in the free exercise of their franchise, the people of Zimbabwe have chosen a Government, under your leadership, to shape their destiny – an action that is indeed a fitting tribute to you for the significant role you played in this heroic undertaking.

President Tolbert continued:

Indeed, we are heartened by your statesmanlike pronouncements promotive of national reconciliation, reconstruction and good neighborliness. Ours remain the fervent hope that amidst the inevitable difficulties of transition and adjustments at this juncture of your history, the WILL of the people of Zimbabwe to national self-fulfillment will triumph as it has in the revolutionary struggle for independence.

The President assured the prime minister of the Liberian government's disposition to work with him and his government "in all matters of mutual interest, and in the furtherance of African unity and solidarity." The President looked forward to his "presence in Salisbury for the Independence Ceremonies." The letter concluded:

I am entrusting this message in the care of my Minister of State for Presidential Affairs, Dr. D. Elwood Dunn, and it would please me, dear Brother, were you to receive him and accord full faith and credence to all he shall communicate to you in my name, especially when he shall renew to you our best wishes for your personal well-being and for the gallant people of Zimbabwe peace, unity, solidarity and progress.

As the audience lasted for a full hour, we had the opportunity to elaborate on some of the points of the letter but also to listen to the Prime Minister's intimation of the leadership task that lay ahead. He wanted to allay white fears and appeal for Black patience; that Ian Smith had bluntly told him that he would have preferred Nkomo to him; that he knew he and his party would not do well in the Bulawayo region in the elections. The task was nothing short of reconstructing a present and future by a united people. We indicated that President Tolbert and delegation, to include the minister of Information, would arrive in



Salisbury on April 16, 1980. The Prime Minister then asked for another meeting with us before departure for lunch or supper, hoping that First Lady, Mrs. Sarah “Sally” Mugabe would have returned from a trip to her native Ghana.

As we took leave of the Prime Minister, we visited briefly the office of my counterpart, the minister of state in the office of the Prime Minister, Emmerson Mnangagwa. His role was actually larger than my own, as he was also advisor for political and security affairs in addition to involvement with the prime minister’s other function as defense minister. Our delegation asked to see Home Affairs Minister Joshua Nkomo, and Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Simon Muzenda. We saw Muzenda on April 9<sup>th</sup> and Nkomo on April 10<sup>th</sup> and had fruitful exchanges with both officials. I was personally keen on meeting Nkomo having read about him as perhaps the principal liberation figure in Southern Rhodesia during my school days.

A second meeting with the prime minister materialized on the evening of April 9<sup>th</sup>. Unfortunately, Mrs. Mugabe had still not returned from her travel. At 7:30 p.m. on the 9<sup>th</sup>, we arrived at the prime minister’s residence and found Minister Mnangagwa waiting for us. The discussion soon turned on the organization and function of the office of the Liberian minister of state for presidential affairs. Clearly there was a search for models, and I was quizzed on the Liberian model. It was my good fortune that I had begun giving thought to our office, though I had been in office then only a few months. Minikon took copious notes on what I said as reflected in our report. As the prime minister came into the parlors where we were seated, he insisted we put aside protocol and relax with him as friends and brothers. This was the atmosphere that pervaded for the next three hours of conversation and supper. The Zimbabweans intimated that, having inherited a white bureaucracy, they were seeking ideas regarding the role of the chief of staff/minister of state in the office of the President of Liberia, as they worked on establishing a similar office. They even expressed to us their anxieties in integrating, as the Lancaster House Talks had mandated, three heretofore-rival armies: the 40,000 strong of the Ian Smith regime, some 9,000 from ZANU/PF or the Mugabe forces, and 6,500 from Nkomo’s ZAPU forces.

As we finally took leave of the prime minister, we have this line recorded in our report: “a deeply-felt warm embrace ensued at the door as we took leave of this great and genuine African leader.” Mugabe’s reply letter to Tolbert reads in part:

I thought I should drop you a line in a more informal manner firstly, to thank you for having sent the Minister of State in your office, Dr. Dunn, to bring me a special message from you, and secondly, for having accepted

my invitation to attend our independence Celebrations. Dr. Dunn's visit has naturally offered me and some of my colleagues in Government a favorable opportunity to hold with him informal discussions on matters of common interest. I think we have fully utilized him.

We made detailed arrangements for President Tolbert's visit to Zimbabwe slated for April 16, 1980. We then departed Salisbury April 10<sup>th</sup> for the return journey home via Nairobi, Kenya. Minikon and I used the couple of days in Nairobi to put finishing touches to the report on our mission. Little did we imagine the momentous event that was about to take place in Liberia. Unbeknownst to us while we were in Zimbabwe, there was an escalation of the political tension at home. This tension included rumors of two possible coup plots. The first was to be a palace coup carried out by state security elements sympathetic to the old guard of the TWP. Supposedly, this operation was to be executed once Tolbert departed to attend the independence celebrations in Zimbabwe on Monday, April 14. This was only a day or two after I was scheduled to return to Liberia from Zimbabwe. The rumor had it that there would have been "a contrived jailbreak by the security," and "in that moment when the zealots were seen to be running from their cells, they would be gunned down." This was the exact scenario Matthews had provided American diplomats during his November 1979 visit to the US Monrovia Embassy. The second coup plot, which actually materialized, was the one reportedly led by the lower rankers of the Armed Forces of Liberia.

Christopher Minikon and I were at the Nairobi residence of Ambassador James B. Freeman, awaiting our flight home by Pan Am the evening of April 12, 1980. On the morning of April 12, however, Ambassador Freeman received a phone call from American Ambassador to Kenya, Wilbert John Le Melle, informing him that President Tolbert had been assassinated and the Liberian Government overthrown. The news brought a profound pause, as we struggled to digest it.

Somehow with the Ambassador's permission I managed to reach my wife Matilda in Liberia by telephone. She was understandably extremely nervous as she tried to relate her circumstances in the immediate aftermath of the coup. She assured me that she was security conscious and that we had some good neighbors and friends, who were very helpful to her and the children. Among those helpful were the families of Henry Lavala and Earl Burrowes, as well as Amos Sawyer.

Regaining our composure, we decided to take our flight from Nairobi that evening, spend an evening in Lagos, Nigeria, and then go to Freetown, Sierra Leone, reasoning that we would from that vantage point receive more direct

information about what had transpired in our country, including when the closed Roberts International Airport (RIA) would reopen. We would spend ten anxious days in Freetown, returning home to face our fate on April 22, 1980.

Arriving in Freetown, we first went to the residence of our ambassador, Dr. Joseph G. Morris, who looked upon us as though we were from another planet, even as he gave us a run-down of the composition of the new government, with the name of Dr. George Boley replacing me as minister of state for presidential affairs. A senior official of the Embassy, Charles Lewis, who was married to Eve Armstrong, someone I had known as a teenager in Grand Bassa County, graciously offered us shelter for the ten days we would spend in Freetown. By then, we had used the per diem the government had provided us and were somewhat stranded. Some kind soul arranged for us to meet with Sierra Leone President Siaka Stevens, who warmly received Minikon and me. While waiting to see Stevens, we encountered Sierra Leone Vice President S.I. Koroma who, among other things, advised that we be careful with the timing of our return, recalling the tragedy in Zaire (DRC), where Politician Pierre Mulele was put to death after being lured to return from exile by President Mubutu. President Stevens said as much, as he warmly received us, offered words of advice, and gave each of us a modest purse in Leones and US dollars. This is how we survived in Freetown until our return home.

Anxious to inform my spouse about where we were (though I was able to speak with Matilda briefly shortly on hearing about the coup while in Kenya, she did not know about our travel plans), I decided to write to inform her and consider using diplomatic channels in Monrovia to get the note to her. The Cameroonian Ambassador in Monrovia, Henry Fossung, was a graduate schoolmate and good friend, who knew where we lived in Monrovia. I thought the US Embassy in Freetown could help get the note to Ambassador Fossung. I therefore asked to see the chief of mission of the US Embassy, which was granted immediately. Upon my arrival at the Embassy, however, it was a consular officer who greeted me, thinking that I desired a visa to go to the US. When I told the gentleman what my mission actually was, he agreed to pass my message to Fossung, and it eventually reached my wife.

We then heard that Bishop George Browne of the Episcopal Church of Liberia was in town, having himself been stranded due to the closure of RIA. He had come to Freetown from a trip to London and was at the Bishop's Court of the Anglican Church of Sierra Leone. Because he was my bishop and related to my wife, I went to see him. He was naturally concerned about developments at home, wondering about the whereabouts of people like former Senator Jackson Doe and former Minister Edward Kesselly, as a means of gauging what fate awaited someone like me. The bishop's concern left me ill at ease.

I then decided to try reaching my successor at the Mansion, the new Minister of State George Boley, by phone. Folks at the Liberian Embassy allowed me to use their phone. (The PRC government through Boley's good offices would make payment later.) As my old phone number rang, Dr. Boley picked up the phone and, once he recognized it was me, he was most welcoming. I had come to know Boley upon his return home from graduate school perhaps in 1977 or 1978. He was appointed an assistant minister of education. We came to know one another rather well, and our views about the state of affairs in the country were somewhat similar regarding Tolbert's reform agenda. At the least, he and I had together served on the TWP Special Task Force on Party Reform. I informed him that I was on a government mission with Minikon and that we were stranded in Freetown but anxious to return home to report on our mission to the new head of state. We had actually slightly altered our report, as we thought of the importance of institutional continuity. "You're ok," he assured me. "Just let me know when you are coming. I will send a car to the airport for you." He actually did just that.

## Return Home, April 22, 1980

Our flight, which included Bishop George Browne, left Freetown on April 22, 1980, arriving RIA early afternoon. I experienced anxiety throughout the flight. As we descended for landing, I took my wallet and other items in my pockets and gave them to Bishop Browne asking him to give them to my wife, as I had no idea what actually awaited me. As the plane taxied and came to a halt, I first saw armed soldiers coming toward us. But then I soon spotted two faithful young men from my old office: Administrative Assistant Joseph S. Morris, and Secretary and confidant Francis Passawe run ahead of the soldiers toward me. They embraced me and assured me that the soldiers were there for security purposes. That the presence of Joe and Passawe was a relief is an understatement.

After we retrieved our luggage and went outside the terminal, my wife, Matilda was there to meet me. I also saw a silver Mercedes Benz stretch limousine. Was it waiting for me? Was someone playing games? Had Boley simply told someone to get a car to pick me up from the airport and that someone unwisely decided on this particular car? I had not experienced this kind of luxury when I left RIA as a minister on April 4. But here I was, a defunct minister with shattered nerves riding in majesty? Of course, I thought nothing of the sort. My mind was focused on what had happened to my country and what fate still awaited me. But this scene was enough to feed the rumor mill that I was being given a “royal welcome,” because I had been less than loyal to President Tolbert. Much more than this character assassination awaited me as I soon heard myself likened to “a snake in the grass.” High political office seldom comes without a cross to bear.

Bishop Browne's car was not at the airport, so he rode with Joe, Passawe, Matilda, and me to Monrovia. Midway to town, the soldiers ordered the car to stop and ordered us all out. We were all frisked and asked if we had weapons. We continued the journey, passing our home in Paynesville, as we headed for the Mansion as per instructions from Minister Boley. We disembarked at the Mansion's diplomatic entry and, with Morris and Passawe leading the way, we were taken to Boley's office on the fourth floor. It was actually then a deputy minister's office he was using. On the way, a couple of old-timer soldiers greeted me in a friendly manner, while many more stared at me, wondering who I was. As we entered Boley's office he was most welcoming and friendly as usual. I remained cautious. In the office, Minikon and I reported on our

mission to Zimbabwe and presented our report with a cover letter to the new head of state. Boley said many things, as I was all ears, hardly uttering a word. Two things he said that stuck: The names of Chesson and Dennis were prefaced with "the late." The second thing that stuck was that the car would take us home, and he would come to see me at my home at the end of the workday.

As we left Boley's office and walked pass the Executive Lounge on the fourth floor, I saw seated Liberia's Christian leaders, among them Roman Catholic Bishop Michael Francis, Lutheran Bishop Roland Payne, and Providence Baptist Pastor E. Tormu Reeves. There were others I don't now recall. Led by Bishop Francis, they rose and embraced me each of them. It was a warm feeling in all respects. I later learned that they were there to see Head of State Doe to urge an end to any further executions.

We went downstairs and climbed into the car and headed first to Minikon's home, which was nearer. On the way, the car radio was playing BBC, and the focus on Africa program began announcing horrific executions by firing squad in Monrovia earlier in the day. The reference was clear as they began naming colleagues I had worked with, two of them once my immediate supervisors: Foreign Minister C. Cecil Dennis and my predecessor at the Mansion, Hon. E. Reginald Townsend. I was numb, felt lost. Jovial Cecil Dennis had walked into my office at the Executive Mansion almost exactly a year earlier to distressingly announce: "Dunn, Felli is dead!" This was in reference to former Ghanaian Commissioner of Foreign Affairs Roger Felli, a faithful companion and friend at OAU meetings across the continent. Felli was one of the victims of Flight Lt. Jerry John Rawlings' bloody coup of 1979. Now, the horror was visiting us in Liberia.

Shortly after I was dropped off at my Paynesville home, something very strange occurred. All along the afternoon had been a sunny one, and then suddenly darkness fell upon the land. It lasted for a good while and then dissipated as the sun returned. What happened was not just my imagination. I have read quite a few accounts of this strange occurrence on the afternoon of April 22, 1980.

I tried to settle once I reached home and digest what my mind was telling me: my president brutally assassinated, 13 former officials, many of them colleagues, murdered in cold blood, the sudden darkness. It seemed all so surreal. As the day ended, I waited for Boley. He arrived at my home past midnight with heavily armed soldiers as bodyguards. I greeted them, offered food and drinks. Boley took nothing. The soldiers did. Boley and I repaired to my small study, and there we talked. I spoke a little more than I did at his office, though I largely listened. What did he tell me? He told me a small part of the logistics of the coup, namely that while in prison with his dissident PPP colleagues, a

soldier arrived in an unusual manner and pushed him into the rest room to deliver a note, which the soldier hid in his boots. The note was from the coup leaders that simply said, all was set to go. Boley replied affirmatively, and the rest, as they say, is history.

With the coup complete, Boley and his colleagues were released from prison and taken to the Executive Mansion to begin the task of organizing a successor government. As he left my home, he promised to stay in touch, which he did as he invited me to his office at the Mansion a couple of times, ostensibly so that I would show him what this or that phone was for. The real reason, I believe, was that he wanted to reaffirm our friendship. Decades later, I would speak with Boley in his New York prison, where he was serving a sentence for reported US immigration violations. Boley was later deported for egregious human rights violations stemming from his involvement as a warlord during the Liberian civil war. He would visit my identical Paynesville home (refurbished after the devastation of the civil war) in 2016. He sought a seat and was elected to the House of Representatives from a district in his native Grand Gedeh County. In 2020, he sought a seat in the Senate from Grand Gedeh as well but was defeated.

I first met Head of State Samuel Doe as he approached Boley's office on the fourth floor, and as Boley introduced me, he said, "I know Dr. Dunn!" More likely he meant, I know of Dr. Dunn. I would meet Doe a second and last time in the parlors of the Mansion on the occasion when the PRC was announcing to Liberia and to the world that there would be no more executions. I believe I had come to that occasion at the invitation of Boley or Dr. Togba Nah Tipoteh. Tipoteh tried introducing me to Doe, who then said he had already met me. On that occasion, Justice Minister Chea Cheepo stared at me in a threatening manner. I was fearful. I was at the Mansion, when he was arrested in the aftermath of the call by the PPP in early March 1980 for the resignation of President Tolbert, and he may have been wondering why I was not now in jail. Decades later, probably in 2015, I felt ill at ease when I sat next to Cheepo at a public function in Paynesville, a Monrovia suburb.



## Uncertainty & Consultancy at Foreign Ministry

While at Boley's office, I also met the new foreign minister, Gabriel Bacchus Matthews. He invited me to visit him at the Foreign Ministry. When I asked whether I could call to make an appointment, he said that was not necessary, and added, "Just come and the folks will let me know, as we did when you were here in the Mansion." When I showed up at Matthews' office, he asked me to help with foreign policy challenges for the PRC government. I have a memo that I addressed to Foreign Minister Matthews dated June 9, 1980, with subject line "Suggestions Relating to Foreign Relations." The essence of what I had to suggest was the need for a diplomatic offensive to allay fears, explain but not try to justify the PRC government to our neighboring countries and other OAU member states. I even partly drafted what became a brochure attempting to explain wholly domestic circumstances that triggered the coup and to project a government "in the cause of the people."

One day while still at the Ministry, I was descending the stairs and encountered the Soviet Ambassador to Liberia, A.A. Oulanov who was ascending. He apparently recognized me for as we greeted, he warmly spoke to me these words: "We could use you," seemingly referring to the new political dispensation in Liberia but also exuding then a confidence that socialist-leaning dissidents were senior partners in the PRC government, until a purge of this element occurred in 1981. I consulted with Matthews at the Foreign Ministry late April through mid-June. Though I was there on invitation on an ad hoc basis, a news reporter at a function at Ducor Hotel asked Matthews what my status was at the Foreign Ministry. To which Matthews replied: "Dr. Dunn has no status at the Foreign Ministry." I heard this on radio and decided it was time to leave, which I then quietly did, pointing out to Matthews that I had since May been invited to join the political science faculty of the University of Liberia. I was now ready to don my academic toga.

## Stint at University of Liberia (June – Dec. 1980)

Acting Dean of Liberia College Amos Sawyer had written to me a letter dated May 7, 1980, and sent it in care of my wife, who had been on the science faculty there, since her return from graduate studies in 1975. In it, Sawyer offered me a professorship in the Department of Political Science of Liberia College. He detailed what my responsibilities would be and suggested we meet to finalize the details. I soon began readying myself for the classroom once again. I had under my belt four years of teaching at Seton Hall University in the US and several weeks of part-time teaching at my alma mater, Cuttington College. Though I was now ready to put my all into this new opportunity to serve Liberia, there was some circumspection as I eyed the political atmosphere of PRC governance. A power struggle within the councils of the PRC carried ominous signs. Because I spoke with Sawyer before accepting the position, I pointed out to him that I wanted to do research as well as teach. I had kept government documents of interest during my time both at the Foreign Ministry and the Executive Mansion. I had also acquired some of the papers of the late Foreign Minister Dennis. I told Sawyer these documents could become the foundation for scholarly investigation. I also told Sawyer I wanted to visit the Tubman Library at the late president's Totota Estate in Bong County. Dean Sawyer obliged, even making provision for a modest research grant, which enabled me to spend several weekends in Totota. I was able to invite two of my very bright students to accompany me, Sayku Kromah and S. Loyola Flemming, Jr.

This project marked the resumption of my research career. The heavy responsibilities of working in government meant that I had set research aside since returning to Liberia following my studies abroad. Nevertheless, even in spite of my very heavy schedule at the Mansion, I had not lost sight of my interest in scholarship. My friend, French Ambassador Louis Dollot had once asked me, probably when I was still at the Foreign Ministry, what sort of reading I did for intellectual stimulation. I did not respond directly as I knew reading government papers was all I did then. My Seton Hall days of reading books and scholarly journals had come to a screeching halt. I was not proud of this.

To remedy my academic hiatus, even while working fulltime for the government, I dusted off my doctoral dissertation and thought I should have it published as a book. Two prominent Liberians stood ready to assist me. One was former UL President and former Foreign Minister Rocheforte L. Weeks, who, upon my request, kindly consented to write a foreword to the book.

The other Liberian was Ambassador Emmet Harmon who graciously loaned me a considerable amount of money that made the publication of the book by Hutchinson Benham of London possible. I was also assisted through the good offices of John Gordon, an old British consultant with the Ministry of Information. The book, *The Foreign Policy of Liberia During the Tubman Era, 1944–1971*, was released in June 1979.

Many in government and the larger society commended me for this, my first published book. Some of these people included former Secretary of State J. Rudolph Grimes, Chief Justice James A.A. Pierre, Ambassador Henry Ford Cooper, former Police Director Edwin Luzon Harmon, Montserrado County Representative Ethel Dunbar (who wrote that I belonged to the University as “you are an educator and not a politician”), and Speaker Richard A. Henries. Someone drafted, and President Tolbert signed a letter of praise, calling the book “a brilliant and striking debut of a promising career as a writer, scholar and social scientist.” From two foreign nationals I received congratulations as well. The Liberia general manager of African Explosive and Chemicals Ltd (EXCHEM), T.P. Toppazzini, wrote to say he had read the book in its entirety, commended me, and wanted us to get together to exchange viewpoints. The other foreign national was the former general manager of Bong Mining Company, Dr. E.P. Plotzki, who had read the book “with care” and wondered when a second book would be forthcoming.

Although I was happy to be back in an academic environment at the University of Liberia, a number of things happened that led me to reassess my decision to remain in the country. The first was a series of visits to my home in the early hours of the morning by unauthorized soldiers. I was there the first time as they banged on the door, which we did not open. They walked around the house remarking “why is he not inside [prison] like the other people; we will take him inside tonight.” Matilda and I were under the bed with the phone, trying to reach friends in the PRC government. Planning Minister Tipoteh said I was not a wanted person, and that he would check what was happening and get back to me. Dr. Peter Naigow, a deputy minister of information and a good friend showed up at our house with his guards a couple of hours later when the soldiers had left. What a relief it was, nevertheless! The rogue soldiers left because the driver of a taxicab owned by Matilda had returned home past curfew time and decided to sleep in the car parked in our backyard. He was rudely awakened and demanded where we were. Quick thinking led him to say, “the people are gone out of town,” and so they left vowing to return.

Another time, soldiers came to my home and harassed my wife, my two small children, my mother-in-law, and a couple of young children that were part of our household, while I was in Totota researching at the Tubman Estate.

They entered the house this time and said they were looking for me. As they threatened to take the whole family to prison until I showed up, our young foster daughter, Bennetta Kannah, spoke to the menacing soldiers in the Krahn language. They immediately became interested, inquiring of her whether we had sent her to school, and were otherwise kind to her. Her answer in the affirmative seemed sufficient for the soldiers, as they then left our yard. Decades later in 2020, with the help of her son, Bennetta joyfully found me on Facebook, and she has returned to the fold of our family. But the return was soon marred by tragedy with Matilda's death. Our family meeting with Bennetta was doleful, as we gathered at the funeral in Washington in January 2021.

A second thing during my time at the University was that an increasingly tense national political climate began to spill over into my classroom. As tension began brewing between Doe and Thomas Weh Syen, his co-chair, some of my students would call me aside and whisper some of the goings-on to me. In addition, still other students began informing me that security agents sat in my classes to monitor what I might be saying about the military government. Thus, speaking in the classroom was proving to be a challenge.

Then a third thing happened that left me really uneasy. Our 9-year-old son, Dan, had been picked up from school by a relative without our knowledge. When the car we regularly sent to get him arrived, the school authorities had no idea of where our son might be. When the information reached us, we panicked, thinking that political foes had kidnapped our child to get at me. Though the fear subsided, when the facts became known, we decided it best to send both Dan and his younger sister, Chandra (born at ELWA Hospital February 7, 1976), to friends in the United States. A friend, Mrs Albertine Onumanh, who was also travelling to the US, agreed to serve as guardian for the kids on the plane and deliver them to our American friends at the airport, Patrick and Esther Malloy. We would obviously not be far behind them.

In the months that followed, I tried to maintain a low profile and avoid speaking in public. As an example, I turned down an invitation to speak at Monrovia College's graduation. From President Louise C. York of Monrovia College, I received a warm letter of invitation that read: "The Faculty, Staff and Graduating Class of Monrovia College ... have unanimously selected you to be our Commencement Speaker on Sunday, December 7, 1980 ... at Monrovia College on Camp Johnson Road." The letter went on: "Because of your interest in Education and the Youths of Liberia, we are confident that our Graduates would benefit tremendously from your address being someone who is familiar with the Educational trends of our Country." While appreciating fully the kind gesture, I had to regretfully decline the request. As a former minister of the deposed Tolbert administration with a large number of former officials still

political prisoners of the PRC regime, I thought it unwise to be making public utterances, and I informed Mrs. York accordingly, adding that I considered it prudent to limit what I have to say to the classroom.

Increasingly, I began making plans for moving to the US, where our children continued living with friends. While attending the annual conference of the African Studies Association in Philadelphia in July 1980, I put out feelers for a teaching position in the US. I managed to complete the 1980 academic year, attending commencement at the Fendell campus in December. My decision to leave Liberia was confirmed as I listened to commencement speaker Albert Porte. On the podium that day were UL President Mary Antoinette Brown Sherman and the Visitor to the University, Head of State Samuel K. Doe. Porte uttered many words of wisdom in his “The Challenge of Building Together in A Changing Liberia” speech. What he said seemed to speak to me directly, given that I had firmly decided to exile myself from the land of my nativity: “And to those of our fellow citizens who would run away from our crisis, I say to you in the spirit of love: Running away never solves a problem. To give up in worry and despair, questions the permissive will of God to work out everything for our good according to His will. It also saps us of the potential intelligence and vitality God Himself has given us as co-partners with Him to solve our problems through spiritual intuition.”

I chose to place Porte’s “spiritual intuition” in perspective based on my experience as well as the lessons of history. The immediate situation I faced seemed threatening to my young family and me. I also remembered how revolutions devoured their own. I opted for a strategic retreat so that I might live to struggle another day.

## Transition back to USA

Leaving Liberia was not something I had never seriously contemplated before the final months of 1980. Even in Nairobi, after being informed that President Tolbert had been overthrown, it did occur to me that I should explore exile in another country instead of returning home. My focus, however, was on my Liberia and my family of a wife and two small children. Despite the violent coup, I was determined to return home either to face my fate or to at least assess the situation and chart for myself a new life in the private sector. After all, back in graduate school days I had opted to pursue a PhD precisely so that I would have options. It was now time, I thought, to exercise that option: teaching, research, and consultancy work. These were all viable options in my mind.

Of course, the thought also occurred to me that I could turn around and go back to Mugabe, tell him I was in serious trouble and needed his help in securing for me a job perhaps at a university in Zimbabwe. The option of returning to the US was also there. My focus at that point, nonetheless, was on returning home and exploring whether the reformation of Liberia that struggled to be born in the 1970s might just have a chance, given the tremendous sacrifice of blood and treasure that the coup at one level represented. My college president, Dr. Christian Baker remarked in a conversation, upon my return home, that the military leaders had the opportunity to change Liberia by fiat, meaning they could decree positive change as Jerry Rawlings did in Ghana a year earlier. I knew individuals among the so-called progressives. Gabriel Bacchus Matthews, whose mother was a Greene, was related by marriage to my wife, and our infrequent association dates from Seton Hall days in the early 1970s. Togba Nah Tipoteh and H. Boima Fahnbulleh, Jr., were academic colleagues. I knew Fahnbulleh's father, Ambassador H.B. Fahnbulleh, Sr., and my wife knew well his sister the artist, Miatta Fahnbulleh. Fahnbulleh's mother and I were fellow Episcopalians. Nete Sie Brownell of the Brownell Commission was Fahnbulleh's grandfather. Amos Sawyer was both an academic colleague and a cousin to my wife. Dew Mayson is also a childhood friend of my wife. I knew well the iconic pamphleteer Albert Porte, as I did my Episcopal Bishop George D. Browne and Roman Catholic Bishop Michael Kpakala Francis. The Rev. Dr. Arthur Flomo Kulah, then about to become Bishop of the United Methodist Church, was a Cuttington College schoolmate. I also knew the reformist leanings of former Cabinet colleagues and other officials such as Edward Binyah Kesselly, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Florence Chenoweth, Trohoh Kparghai, Johnny McClain, Peter

Naigow, George Boley, Byron Tarr, John Woods, UL President Mary Antoinette Brown Sherman, her spouse Ambassador George Flamma Sherman, Patrick L.N. Seyon, Zamba Liberty, James Teah Tarpeh, Bertha Baker Azango, and a whole host of others. They were all in Liberia. Even those in prison would soon be released, I thought. The dark reality of the public executions was not then a part of my calculus. These people I have mentioned would not just sit there and see Liberia go down the drain, I thought. I would return home and somehow cast my lot with them. Liberia would rise again more united and stronger. These were my thoughts when the temptation of fear did not intrude. Even when fear had the momentary upper hand, I would call forth my Christian faith and simply “surrender all.”

Following the shock of my return home that fateful April 22, 1980, I found myself in the company of some of these very people. Besides the associations already mentioned with Boley and Matthews and Sawyer, somehow, I was invited to a meeting that took place at the home of former Secretary of State J. Rudolph Grimes. Present were Boley, Tarr, Shad Tubman, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, and Ambassador Turner Stewart (probably others I do not recall). The purpose of the gathering was to generate ideas to help stabilize the immediate post-coup environment. Alluding to the PRC government's tendency toward frequent use of the national radio for the simplest communication, I recall Grimes saying to Boley, “All it takes is a simple telephone call if the government needed to see someone, rather than commanding the person's presence in a threatening manner on national radio.” It was the degree of the meeting of minds at this gathering that led Grimes to accept to be a part of Doe's delegation to an OAU-related meeting in Togo. I believe that it was in the same spirit that I consulted with Matthews at the Foreign Ministry. In all of the foregoing, I may have been naive, but that was my state of mind.

So, I was not happy toward the end of 1980 when I felt impelled by the turn of events to begin making plans to exile myself from my native land. I agonized. I had a young family and did not want to put a hold on my life, nor did I want to continue to expose myself to unnecessary risks given the power struggle then raging in the PRC government and the open distrust that had so quickly become a hallmark of Liberian society.

In the beginning, there were two PRC centers of power, one at the Executive Mansion where Doe sat as chair, and the other at the Capitol Building housing the legislature where co-chair Weh Syen sat. The two men soon began actively thinking about power consolidation. Though there may have been a third center at BTC, where General Thomas Quiwonkpa sat, his own showdown with Doe was still in the future. Meanwhile, officials supporting Doe and Weh Syen, respectively, began urging their principals to flex their political muscles and



act lest their coveted standing be undermined. With more resources at his command, Doe began acting to contain Weh Syen.

Even Boley, ensconced in Doe's camp, had now become inaccessible to me. Though I had travelled to the US in July and returned, when I took my passport to the Immigration Bureau for an exit visa (then a universal requirement), the passport was sent to the Executive Mansion for clearance. I tried to reach my friend Boley but this was to no avail. I next turned to a fellow Episcopalian friend, G. Alvin Jones, who was then treasurer of the Episcopal Church and a relative and confidant of Doe's. What he told me was an eye opener. Jones visited Doe's office and found my passport on the desk of the head of state. When he inquired about the passport, Doe first told him that Boley had brought it to him and then he asked Jones whether he knew "the man," meaning me. Jones replied in the affirmative adding how close we had become since our days as students at Cuttington College. Thereupon Doe gave Jones my passport, exclaiming, "the man want go, let him go, let him go!" I took this as a threat when reported to me, suggesting I may have been on some blacklist at the airport, which I would find out only after I reached the airport. At any rate, Jones took the passport to Immigration and secured for me the exit visa. What a relief it was when he called me to pick up the passport, though I remained fearful that I would be blocked from departure at the airport.

With my passport in hand along with my plane ticket, all was set for my departure for the US in December 1980, when crossing a street in Monrovia I experienced an encounter. A black Mercedes Benz car with heavily tinted windows pulled up near me and stopped. The door opened and out came GSA Director Charles Taylor, the man who later led the rebellion touching off the 14-year Liberian civil war. I had come to know Taylor through my loose association with ULAA, while still in graduate school in the US and during my time at Seton Hall University. Moses Doupu (a student of mine at Seton Hall), Norman Cole, a family friend whose father was an Episcopal priest, Jangaba Johnson, a fellow graduate student, Tom Woewiyu, and others were in the ULAA mix. Although we had never been close before, Taylor now embraced me warmly, asked about my wellbeing and invited me to visit his GSA office. I was appreciative of the kind gesture and told him I would honor his offer. But that was not to be, since I was carrying my passport and plane ticket for departure to the US that evening.

Perhaps Taylor's first encounter with Tolbert came in the aftermath of the April 14<sup>th</sup> crisis. In the months before the April 1980 coup, while Taylor was still based in the US and extremely active in the ULAA, he had several explosive encounters with Tolbert. Early in October 1979, President Tolbert visited the US amidst intense anti-Tolbert protests in New York and Washington. The

real showdown occurred in Washington, as Tolbert invited the leadership of the protest inside the Liberian Embassy for a dialogue. According to Liberian security officials present, the President asked the question, "How long have you been away from home?" The implication was that the protesters might have been away so long that they may have lost touch with developments on the ground. Charles Taylor replied: "With due respect, Mr. President, this is none of your damn business." Bai Gbala, the ULAA president intervened, offering an apology for Taylor's outburst. Undeterred, President Tolbert invited a ULAA delegation to visit Liberia and see the modest progress that was being made. They agreed. The President facilitated the visit by fully funding it. A team consisting of Taylor, Gbala, Blamo Nelson, Nyudueh Morkonmana, and Ignatius Clay arrived in Liberia in February 1980. At the time, I was serving as minister of state in the Tolbert government.

I recall receiving reports that on their arrival at RIA security personnel were not welcoming, to say the least. The group that included Taylor eventually made their way to Monrovia and was received by the President. I was in the President's office, as they arrived. Tolbert greeted and welcomed them but in the course of doing so and as Charles Taylor approached the President, the two men launched into something in the Kpelle language for a good while, as the rest of us in the room simply watched. I had not recalled the substantive discussion during the meeting but was reminded decades later by Bai Gbala, who was then ULAA president. In a statement by Gbala on the association's behalf, he detailed the circumstances that led to the visit, and some of the issues they raised with the government. Among the issues were freedom of speech and press, voting rights, and immigration challenges of Liberians resident in the US. An addendum to the statement acknowledged that Tolbert had taken important steps toward removing all qualifications for voting other than the age of maturity.

At the end of the meeting, given feelings of apprehension especially as regards the attitude of state security, the President looked in my direction and told the visitors that, whenever they needed to reach him, even during weekends, they should call me. Then he said to me: "I hope you don't mind their having your phone number." Of course, I obliged. I don't recall that they ever needed me. What I do recall is that they were provided material resources to facilitate their travel throughout the country. I have among my papers two receipts documenting an amount made available to the ULAA team through me, bearing my signature and that of Bai Gbala. The ULAA team may have concluded their tour and were poised to share their experience with President Tolbert before returning to the US, when the Tolbert government was overthrown.

Taylor and Gbala were among members of the ULAA team in country, when the coup occurred. They emerged as important players in the formative days of the PRC government. Now, as I prepared to leave home for US exile in December 1980, my path crossed that of both men, however briefly.

## Back in the USA – Seeking Permanent Residency

Re-entry to the US was difficult. First, I had to retrieve my young son and daughter from American family friends, Patrick and Esther Malloy, who had cared for them as part of their own family for six months. They had done us a big favor, and now we were reassembling our family. Matilda remained in Liberia to join us in a few weeks. She was expecting our third child and second daughter. A good family friend in the Bronx, NY, Ben Clarke, accommodated us before we found our own place in South Plainfield, New Jersey.

I was now in search of a job at an American college or university. I applied immediately for political asylum, reasoning that this might be the quickest means of settling before applying anew for permanent resident status, given that I had deliberately destroyed the green card acquired through Seton Hall University in 1972.

While my asylum application was still active, I received a telephone call from a US State Department official suggesting that it was “incongruous” that I would be applying for political asylum when the PRC government was considering me for a position in Liberia. I was flabbergasted, as I had received no such information. The caller, who had evidently been thoroughly briefed about me, proceeded to inform me that as the Immigration Service was processing my application for political asylum, it became necessary for the Department to contact the US Embassy in Liberia to double-check some of what I had represented in my asylum application. The Embassy took the occasion to request the Department to urge me to withdraw my application for political asylum because the military government was about to offer me the Cabinet portfolio of minister of foreign affairs. But for the fact that I was aware of the unusual degree of support for the Doe government by the United States, I would have dismissed the entire matter as a joke. But that American support became clearer at least between the years 1981 through 1985. To the letter from Immigration of October 5, 1984, denying my request for asylum was attached a document from the State Department expressing US government support in 1981 for the situation in Monrovia. Simply entitled “Dunn, D. Elwood, 17 749 897, Citizen of Liberia,” it read in part:

The political situation in Liberia is currently such that nearly all Liberians may now return to their country without fear of persecution. This is not to say they could return to resume exactly the same life-style they had

four years ago. Economic conditions have changed and so have some of the realities of life. These changes in life-style, however, would not constitute persecution.

The sarcasm directed at a certain group of Liberians aside, here was yet another attempt by a foreign government to fuel division in Liberia, especially at a time that called for national healing. With no appreciation of the social nuances and the many crosscutting cleavage realities of Liberia, the ubiquitous “us” versus “them” was being peddled by official America.

My own perspective was that the State Department was not only attempting to pressure me to return home at a time when I needed some respite from the crisis occasioned by the April 1980 coup but also at a time when I was aware of the pending clash between Doe and fellow coup organizer Thomas Weh Syen, the other highest-ranking member of the PRC. I was fearful of what would ensue. My fears were not unfounded. Following a reported failed attempt to overthrow Samuel Doe, Weh Syen and four other members of the military junta were executed in August of 1981. Far from any interest in my “future political career,” as the State Department caller put it, the US was seeking to rally what it saw as forces of moderation and pragmatism so that a political vacuum would not be created for “communist exploitation” of the Liberian situation, as it existed in 1981. Quite apart from the fact that there were so many other variables, I was not prepared to be used to serve any American bureaucrat’s idea of what was good for Liberia, for I was convinced then, as I remain today, that only if Liberians determine what is good for Liberia will there be sustainable peace and development.

In a telephone conversation in April 2020, with Dr. George Boley, who was minister of state for presidential affairs in 1981, he acknowledged that it came within his hearing that my name had been mentioned for the foreign ministry portfolio, possibly to replace the then Foreign Minister H. Boima Fahnbulleh. Boley explained how Weh Syen’s execution, and Tipoteh’s defection and exile in the Netherlands, had occasioned several reshuffles of the Cabinet. Boley informed me as well of the American CIA presence at the Executive Mansion, which may explain why information about me travelled so rapidly to the American Embassy and on to the State Department.

I would have been walking “through the valley of the shadow of death” had I been in Liberia and therefore constrained to submit to such political machinations, given the atmosphere induced by the Weh Syen execution, the removal of Fahnbulleh, and his replacement by Ernest Eastman, a perceived Tubman-era moderate. Eastman underscored to me how the US intimacy with Doe may have explained the behavior of American Ambassador Edward

Perkins, who had the habit of marching unannounced into the foreign minister's office. In addition, the 1984 military attack on students, faculty, and staff at the University of Liberia, the imprisonment of Amos Sawyer in the wake of that attack, and the 1985 abortive Quiwonkpa coup would have complicated my political and personal life. These events inexorably led to the beginning of Charles Taylor's insurgency and the devastating civil war that consumed the country for 14 long years.

At any rate, I chose to stay the course of my quest for permanent residency, even as I actively sought a teaching job. So, our family remained focused on two things at this time: healthcare for an expecting family with no medical insurance and my quest for employment. We were managing with a modest amount acquired from the sale in Liberia of our used car, and consultancy fees made possible through my Ghanaian friend and colleague, Dr. A. Zachary Yamba, veteran President of Essex County College, whom I had known during my Seton Hall University days in the early 1970s.

Our baby girl came to us on April 26, 1981. We named her Germaine Sunu. We were now a family of three, two girls and a boy, our first son. We struggled to pay the medical bills. We found the physician, Dr. Thomas V. Judge, accidentally, simply by seeing the sign on his New Jersey office building. After making a couple of out-of-pocket payments, we told him about our situation. He agreed to defer further payments, including the hospital cost for delivery until I was employed. When employment came, I began dutifully paying what I owed Dr. Judge until I received from him a note dated February 6, 1986. The note reads: "Dear Mr. Dunn: This is to express my admiration for the persistence with which you have paid me over the years. My gratitude has been renewed with each installment. Please consider your bill paid in full and send me no more payments. Best regards to your family. Sincerely yours, Thomas V. Judge, MD." What unexpected relief! What pleasure of delight! What wondrous blessings!

## Sewanee Materialized Summer 1981

I had applied to a few colleges to teach political science and international affairs. I also visited the headquarters of the Episcopal Church in New York City to explore Episcopal colleges. My Alma mater, Cuttington College, was one of the few worldwide Episcopal/Anglican colleges. The Rev. Dr. Fred Burnham, head of the Association of Episcopal Colleges, took my cv and circulated it among the half a dozen Episcopal colleges in the US. Two former Cuttington College presidents, Dr. Christian Baker and the Rev. Dr. Emmanuel W. Johnson, who were visiting the headquarters at the same time had some very kind things to say about me to Dr. Burnham.

In the early spring of 1981, I received a phone call from Dr. Gilbert Gilchrist, chairman of the political science department at the University of the South (Sewanee hereafter). Dr. Brown Patterson, the dean of the college at Sewanee had given Dr. Gilchrist my credentials, information the dean had received from Dr. Burnham. Gilchrist invited me to visit Sewanee for an interview. This was my second serious consideration of an offer. The first was Colby College in Maine. I recall being at the Lansdowne, Pennsylvania, home of Svend Holsoe the day President Ronald Reagan was shot and the day I received a first call from Colby College. When things did not materialize at Colby, my option now was Sewanee. I had never visited Tennessee and knew no more about the school than brief brochure information. But here I was, with a young family, unemployed, and on the verge of depleting the meager family resources remaining.

After a snowstorm in the New York area initially delayed my trip to Sewanee I finally arrived at Sewanee, also called the “Holy Mountain,” because the Episcopal school stood atop Monteagle Mountain, part of the Cumberland Plateau. I was warmly received by members of the small political science faculty of a University of the South, which itself had then by design a student body of a thousand students. Chaired by Gilchrist, other members of the department were Dr. Robert Keele, Dr. John McCarthy, Dr. Barclay Ward, Dr. Charles Brockett, and Mrs. Joan Ward. That was it. Dr. Patterson was dean of the college, and there was a School of Theology, which with the college constituted the University of the South. Dr. Robert M. Ayres was vice chancellor and president of the university. All these fine people came across to me as genuine Christians and/or progressive-thinking American educators.

The political science faculty was distinguished and multi-talented, some with strong links to the Episcopal Church. Chairman Gilchrist was a Johns



Hopkins PhD, who taught American government and politics. Keele was an Emory PhD, focusing on public law and American government. Brockett was a UNC/Chapel Hill PhD, with a Latin American and Human Rights orientation. John McCarthy was also a UNC/Chapel Hill PhD, focused on Asian politics, and American campaigns and elections. Barclay and Joan Ward were both Johns Hopkins SIAS graduates and former US Foreign Service officers, with Barclay's PhD from the University of Iowa. Barclay focused on the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and Arms Control and Disarmament, while his wife Joan did Western Europe and international institutions.

I met with members of the department, the Dean of the College, Provost, Dr. Arthur Schaefer and other administrators, as well as with some political science majors. I was struck by one question asked me by the students: "Why would you want to join a faculty where you would be the only black person?" My response was that I first did not know that fact, but, even so, I would perhaps be initiating a salutary process that could in time bode well for Sewanee.

My impression upon my arrival was that of a small Southern university striving to live up to its founders' vision, while also reviewing and adjusting some of its heritage. The founding vision was to educate people of goodwill to lead lives of distinction and service. But this noble vision was enmeshed in a history and culture of entanglement in slavery, racial segregation, and white supremacy, as expressed in the Confederacy and its successor mythologies. I would witness Sewanee struggling to distance itself from this sordid history and culture for the duration of my stay on the faculty.

I became a part of the effort to broaden and make more national and international this originally Southern school for Southern gentlemen. I was conscious of where I was and my instinct for caution served me well. I quickly identified the agents of change and gravitated toward them. These change agents were in my department and other departments of the college, the school of theology, and the wider administration of the university. They seemed all sincere and supportive of the presence of my family and me on The Domain, as the University was also called. In time we made friends with some alums, some of them leaders in the Episcopal Church, such as former Presiding Bishop John M. Allin, former Bishop of Mississippi, and civil rights activist Duncan M. Gray, Jr., and former Bishop of Atlanta and Chancellor of the University C. Judson Child, Jr. I developed for myself a simple survival plan: I would do my job as a faculty member within the orbit of my identified change agents. I would establish my relations external to Sewanee through academic associations and the African Diaspora community in the US.

I soon came to learn that my hiring at Sewanee was in the context of increasing the number of minority students. It is important to make clear that

the University consisted of the College and the School of Theology (SOT). The African American Joseph Green became the first Black alumnus, graduating from SOT in 1965. There were only two Black students in the College when I arrived. Though admission of minority students to this then all-white school was approved by the board of trustees in 1961, and the first Black students were admitted in 1963, the first Black student to graduate, Nathaniel Owens (later a judge), did not enter until 1966, graduating in 1970. Thereafter Black enrollment and graduation fluctuated, declining in the late 1970s. Authorities of the institution studied the situation and decided to hire a director of minority students' affairs to recruit and support a more acceptable minority student presence on the campus. Minority Students' Affairs Director Eric Benjamin, an Atlanta Attorney and an alumnus himself, arrived on campus in the fall of 1981, just as I was joining the faculty.

My appointment initially was a temporary one, pending the opening of a tenure position for the political science department. My Cuttington College degree, the PhD from American University, and the four years of teaching at Seton Hall University commended me, including my first book, which was published in 1979, in the midst of the April 14 crisis in Liberia. In 1984, I received appointment to a tenure-track position for what Dean Patterson described as "recognition of the high quality of your work as a teacher and researcher during your three years of service here." Tenure was conferred two years later, and I would remain at Sewanee for thirty-one unbroken years, retiring in 2012 and becoming the Alfred Walter Negley Professor of Political Science Emeritus. W. Brown Patterson, who was dean when I was hired, had this to say of me in a 2009 publication of *The Sewanee Sesquicentennial History* project:

Dunn proved to be an extremely capable professor who inspired his students to become actively interested in African politics, history, and society. Not only was the curriculum enriched by his coming, but it became easier thereafter to recruit African-American scholars to the faculty and to make minority students feel at home at Sewanee.

I met with Dr. Houston Roberson, an African American candidate in January 1997, as he was being considered for employment in the history department. He would become the first African American faculty member at the College, as well as the first African American to earn tenure at the University of the South. His untimely death in 2016, at a time when Sewanee was coming to terms with its slavery and segregationist past, led the institution to honor his memory with "The Roberson Project on Slavery, Race, and Reconciliation."

This is a six-year initiative probing Sewanee's "historical entanglement with slavery and slavery's legacy."

My wife and three children were integral to this story as they integrated well into Sewanee society. In fact, Matilda's own Sewanee career – science teacher at St. Andrews-Sewanee High School, lay chaplain at All Saints' Chapel, international students' advisor, seminarian, and her subsequent ordination to the priesthood of the Episcopal Church – awaits a book-length study of its own. Our fourth and last child, Sedar was born some six years into our time at Sewanee, on November 18, 1987. Those who led in welcoming us included my political science colleagues and a few in other departments, Dean Patterson, Sewanee community leaders Arthur Ben Chitty and his spouse Elizabeth Nick Chitty, and others closely associated with the Episcopal Church. Arthur Ben knew Liberia, as he had worked on Liberia matters at the headquarters of the Church in New York City, and visited Cuttington College several times. Ms. Johnnie Fowler and her associates of Black female civil rights leaders of Franklin County also welcomed us. Through them, we came to establish contact with Sewanee's Black community, where we in time established some strong friendships, thanks largely to Matilda's efforts.

## Highlights of My Sewanee Career

That I had landed a job and settled with my family in Sewanee did not mean that I had abandoned Liberia. The remarks by Albert Porte in his commencement address of December 1980 appealing to his fellow Liberians not to “run away from our crisis,” lingered in my mind. It was in part because I shared the sentiments expressed by Porte that I had returned home after the April 1980 coup. Even though circumstances had now forced me to make what I considered a strategic retreat, Liberia remained a part of my DNA.

Though focused on organizing myself for my new responsibilities as a faculty member at Sewanee, two immediate challenges faced me as well. The first was to regularize my stay in the US, and the second was to determine how I would relate to my native land, for which I continued to harbor deep feelings.

I had travelled from Liberia on a visitor's visa. Upon my arrival, friends, including some at the US State Department advised me to apply for political asylum. I complied. On the basis of that application, US Immigration granted me employment authorization for nine months, allowing Sewanee to hire me. Several years of nerve-wrecking difficulties with US Immigration ensued during which Sewanee was very supportive, playing in the end a critical role in my acquisition or re-acquisition (first acquired 1972) of permanent resident status in 1986. Before this happy ending, however, I received on November 30, 1984, a threatening letter from US Immigration informing me that I had 30 days as of the date of the letter to depart the US voluntarily, failing which I would be deported. Sewanee moved into action on my behalf, even retaining David W. Crosland, a former US Commissioner of Immigration and Naturalization of the Department of Justice, and then in private practice with Morgan Associates, a Washington, D.C. law firm. Crosland took hold of my situation and walked a solution through the system.

## Return to Academia

While Liberia was still on my mind, my immediate task was to focus on effective teaching at Sewanee, and only then determine how I could also serve Liberia. I had kept open lines of communication with most of my former Liberian associates and colleagues, as I remained interested in the unfolding events in the country. I stayed in close touch with Byron Tarr, Doe's second minister of planning and economic affairs and subsequent secretary general of the then newly formed opposition Liberia Action Party (LAP). Tarr was also the first finance minister in the 1990-created Interim Government of National Unity (IGNU), which was led by Amos Sawyer. I remained in touch as well with Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who was then Washington based. Her American administrative assistant or secretary became a friend, who shared with me news reports about Liberia that Sirleaf's office received on an almost daily basis. There was also a host of others that I remained in touch with.

Nevertheless, my Sewanee job came first. Sewanee required its faculty to focus on three things, on the basis of which we would be periodically evaluated and held accountable: measurable effective teaching, substantial contribution to the academic community, and scholarly engagement and publications. I endeavored to put forth only my best on all three counts.

My teaching focused on international relations and comparative politics with regional emphasis on the African continent. I was pressed into offering an introductory course on American government in my first few years. A requirement for the political science major, this was considered the "bread and butter" course that had a large student enrollment of both majors and non-majors. My other offerings included introductory courses in world politics, comparative politics (what we then called the three worlds of politics: Western World, Communist World, and the Third World or developing countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America). In sequence came my specialized courses on the United Nations, International Organizations, Africa in World Politics, Comparative Politics of Nigeria and South Africa, African Political Thought, Pan-Africanism and the OAU, and Post-Conflict Societies in International Relations. There were variations on all of these courses as we conducted seminars for upperclass students, supervised their study-abroad programs, and engaged in simulation exercises of international organizations: the OAU, the UN, and NATO. As the world changed with the implosion of the Soviet Union and the emergence of

intra-state conflicts, other courses were designed taking account of new scholarship on these developments.

Engagement with the academic community was broad and varied. We were all expected to take turns as chairperson of the political science department. I served a five-year stint as chair from 2000 to 2004. I also served on a number of faculty committees including the minority affairs committee, the admissions and scholarship committee, the promotions and tenure committee, the lectures committee, and perhaps a number of others that I no longer recall. I was instrumental in inviting to campus Professor Leonard Jeffries of the City College of New York, Professor Ali Mazrui, Professor Monday Benson Abasiattai (formerly Akpan) of Nigeria, and the Rev. Canon Burgess Carr. Sewanee may have been physically isolated, but it was so well endowed and had a strong tradition of attracting a faithful following of the offspring of alumni that we were in a position to attract to campus for the edification of our students some of the best and brightest in academia, the professions, and many other areas of human endeavor. Among celebrities who visited Sewanee during my time were James Lehrer, Senator John Danforth, Harvard theologian Peter John Gomes, Jessye Norman, South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Ugandan Bishop Festo Kivengere, Julian Bond, Congressman John Lewis, Historian John Hope Franklin, and Nobel Laureate Helen Grace Akwii-Wangusa of Kenya.

My service on the admissions and scholarship committee resulted in a development worth mentioning. It was after I had completed my years of service on this committee that I received a call from either admissions staff or a colleague simply informing me that he had reviewed the file of a Liberian applicant and the required essay was excellent. This was during the 1990s decade of civil war. I was excited and asked to read what he had viewed. I was blown away by the quality of the essay, as I had earlier wondered whether there was any good thing that could come out of Liberia at that most depressing time of unspeakable political violence. I was told that the Liberian applicant was academically qualified for admission but the four full scholarships that the University offered to international students had all been assigned for the ensuing academic year. I also came to learn that these four scholarships were regularly offered to very bright students from India and Pakistan. Fair enough, though I thought that perhaps the time had come to diversify even the small number of offerings to other parts of the world: Eastern Europe, Middle East, or Africa. The authorities eventually bought my logic and shortly thereafter the Liberian applicant was offered a scholarship. Emmanuel Paye Bessay came from Liberia to Sewanee and did so well that he was able to go on to earn a PhD in Molecular Physiology and Biophysics from Vanderbilt University and an MD degree from Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine.

Dr. Bessay is a practicing general surgeon in Quincy, Illinois, as I write. He had found Sewanee in an almanac of American colleges and universities, randomly picked about a dozen, wrote his applications, and asked someone travelling from Liberia to please stamp and drop them in a mailbox in the United States. His faith, humility, determination, and mental endowment brought him to his current exalted status from his lowly beginnings in Grand Bassa County. Emmanuel, his wife Kaibeh, and their young daughters, Rachel, Robin, and Rheanna have all become a part of our extended family.

As part of my academic community service, I prepared and accompanied our students to model OAU and UN sessions at Howard University, Ohio State University, and at Harvard University. We worked with African American students, with international students, with Sewanee's Francophone community, and with the Episcopal Churches on campus: All Saints Chapel (I was a reader of scripture at its annual Festival of Lessons & Carols) and Otey's Memorial Parish (Lay-reader at one point), along with my wife and children. Matilda's decision to enter seminary and subsequently the process of ordination to the priesthood in the Episcopal Church enhanced considerably my community obligations. She served as a lay chaplain of the University under the leaderships of such Sewanee and Episcopal Church notables as the Rev. William W. Millshaps, Bishop John M. Allin, Bishop Duncan M. Gray, Jr., the Rev. Samuel T. Lloyd, III, and the Rev. Thomas Ward.

Matilda was also particularly instrumental in our establishing and sustaining a special relationship with a socially depressed Black community that traditionally serviced the University and Sewanee residents. I served on campus-wide panels addressing town and gown issues, including the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States. I did my part, meeting and counseling with students in good and bad times, with their parents as they visited on parents' weekends and during graduations. I even had the opportunity to offer a few lectures focused on my Episcopal Church history book at an Anglican studies seminar at Sewanee's School of Theology. My community service extended to teaching summer school and engaging in summer activities, including giving talks on Africa to visiting alums and other visitors to the Mountain.

I taught during summers for more than a decade at the Tennessee Governor's School for International Studies located at the University of Memphis. This was a state initiative designed to expose talented high school seniors to the realities of human interaction across national borders. Oh, what talented and delightful students they were! It was not uncommon for me to find myself at an airport and hear shouted out "Dr. Dunn!" by one of the scores of students that passed through the Governor's School. My two daughters took advantage of this opportunity, one of them at the Governor's School for the Arts.



Regarding scholarly publications in 1971, when still in graduate school, I met Professor Svend Holsoe, who was then teaching anthropology at the University of Delaware. I was impressed with his significant collection of archival material and books and other publications on Liberia. Svend had gone to Liberia as a young lad in the early 1950s when his dad was working in Liberia for the US government. Svend came in time to develop an avid interest in things about Liberia and acquired early, though controversial, access to the Liberian national archives. The controversy stemmed from the fact that he had been admitted into an unorganized and inadequately supervised archive. While there, he availed himself of significant state papers, which might have otherwise been classified under professional controlled circumstances. Holsoe's personal collection of Liberiana grew into perhaps the largest single collection of archival material, books, and artifacts on Liberia. In time, I came to emulate Svend with my own developed passion for Liberian history, politics, and culture. I re-established contact with Svend, when I returned to the US in 1980, and he facilitated the copying of some of my Liberian government papers for the library of the Roman Catholic SMA Fathers in Tenaflly, New Jersey. Payments I received for that service helped my family enormously during the early months of my unemployment.

Through Svend, I learned of and joined the Liberian Studies Association (LSA) that had been created in 1968. While in graduate school I also affiliated with the US-based African Studies Association. Later, but only infrequently, did I attend gatherings of the American Political Science Association and the International Studies Association. The genesis of my research efforts was within the ambit of these scholarly associations.

A few months before I went to Sewanee, Svend and I began to collaborate to produce the first edition of the *Historical Dictionary of Liberia*, part of a series on African countries. That co-compiled study, a panoramic and episodic view of Liberian history, was published in 1985. In the years between 1981 and 1985, I attended and presented papers at all the annual meetings of both the Liberian Studies Association and the African Studies Association. My review of books appeared in the *Liberian Studies Journal* (LSJ), the *African Studies Review* (ASR), and other scholarly journals. I served as editor of LSJ 1985–1995, and as guest editor for several volumes thereafter.

During my time as LSJ editor, Similih Cordor was associate editor and Alfred Konuwa was book review editor. We worked well together soliciting articles on many issues of Liberian life. For example, we reached out to Frank Kimble, who headed the Operation Experts team that was requested by President Doe and sent by the US government to rescue the country's economy in the late 1980s. We carried a "News & Notes" feature that published some quite important

historical documents. Byron Tarr's account of "Founding the Liberia Action Party (LAP)," with its candid commentaries on leading personalities of the era, resulted in E. Sumo Jones (a former government official) "reporting" me to my Sewanee university president, because I should have edited out Byron's reference to Jones as being "egotistic." With no comment, Dr. Ayres simply had Jones' letter placed in my mailbox.

My third book, co-authored with Byron Tarr, was *Liberia: A National Polity in Transition* (1988). This was a study that we had originally undertaken under the auspices of a "Nations of Contemporary Africa" series edited by Professor Larry Bowman of the University of Connecticut. Because of philosophical disagreement with Bowman, we withdrew from the series. Our monograph sought to place Liberia in historical, socio-economic, and political perspective, as the nation lived, and still lives, through an unsettling transition from its ancien regime toward a developmental African state.

The fourth book was a solo publication, *A History of the Episcopal Church in Liberia, 1821–1980* (1992). This was a foray on my part into church history and proved to be a window into early education in the Cape Palmas region, as well as some important insights into Liberia's social history. The leading narrative was the planting of a church with a vision of civilizing and Christianizing African peoples. Reaction of the receiving peoples led to adjustments, as educational, healing, and evangelical ministries developed and became the mainstay of the Episcopal Church in Liberia. The study was also a wonderful exposure to archival research. I would do a sequel study almost three decades later: *History of the Episcopal Church of Liberia Since 1980* (2020). This latter book sequentially covers new ground. It portrays a church in crisis in the aftermath of civil war and following the death in 1993 of the visionary Bishop George Daniel Browne.

In 1995 came another publication, *LIBERIA*, World Bibliographical Series Volume 157 (1995). This was an opportunity to place serious published works on Liberia with an important series. It aspired to be a comprehensive annotated bibliography on Liberia through to 1994.

In 2001, Professors Amos Beyan and Carl Patrick Burrowes joined me in publishing the second edition of the *Historical Dictionary of Liberia*. This was an all-Liberia scholars' effort or an attempt to present Liberia from the perspective of Liberians. Though published in 2001, the book has seemingly become standard reference for a wide audience of individuals and groups working on Liberia. In 2009 came my *Liberia and the United States During the Cold War: Limits of Reciprocity*. This was one of my several labors of love. I had longed to study systematically the unique historical and so-called "special relationship" between the US and Liberia. This was my opportunity. The research for this study took me for the first time to the American national archives, and

exposed me to the thinking of American diplomats and other officials who had worked on Liberia or Liberia issues over the decades. I saw human interactions across national borders, as I read diplomatic dispatches from the US Embassy in Monrovia to the State Department in Washington, conceivably for the duration of diplomatic relations between the two countries since 1862. The information and insights I acquired disabused me of the “special relationship” notion and led me instead to the notion of “national interest” as more useful a framework for understanding relations between states, large or small. As the US used development and security assistance as antidote against communism, Liberia was able occasionally to benefit from the arrangement. One colleague thought I had combined in this book “the tools of a dispassionate social scientist with the detailed knowledge of an insider to produce a remarkably even-handed and insightful study.”

In 2011, I published a compilation of *The Annual Messages of the Presidents of Liberia 1848–2010, State of the Nation Addresses to the National Legislature from J.J. Roberts to Ellen Johnson Sirleaf*. This was a byproduct of my research at the national archives of the United States. I had initially asked for everything in the archives bearing on relations between Liberia and the US. The archivists began bringing for my examination everything related to Liberia, directly or indirectly. Suddenly placed before me were piles of the annual messages of the presidents of Liberia starting from the birth of the Liberian republic. I was overwhelmed with enthusiasm, I photocopied madly, taking to my hotel room daily piles of papers. In time, I searched other sources for missing messages, including the Liberian national archives. A Liberian colleague called the compilation “a treasure trove.”

An Occasional Paper was released in 2012, entitled *Liberia and Independent Africa, 1940s to 2012: A Brief Political Profile*. In 2008 came an important paper entitled “Constitutional Documents of Liberia, 1820–1861” that I edited with Mariam Leitner. Though part of the larger study of *Constitutions of the World from the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century to the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*, edited by Horst Dippel, it came in a special Supplement, *Hawai‘i and Liberia*, in *Constitutional Documents of the United States of America, 1776–1869* (and reflected Liberia’s presence during the rise of modern constitutionalism). I attended a couple of gatherings in Germany and Italy, where discussions were held that guided the eventually produced compilations.

The occasional paper came following my retirement from Sewanee, as did the sequel to my church history publication. All of these book-length publications were interspersed by a large number of journal articles and book reviews, op-ed pieces, and numerous forewords to books, including to those of Episcopal

Bishop George D. Browne, Melvin Mason, John Gay, Stanton Peabody, Veronica Fynn Bruey, Katherine Harris, John Yoder, and J. Pal Chaudhuri.

In the course of my scholarly engagements, I served as an external member on the dissertation committees of two Liberian academics, Dr. Carl Patrick Burrowes and Dr. Veronica Fynn Bruey. Burrowes' topic was "Press Freedom in Liberia, 1930–1970: The Impact of modernity, ethnicity and power imbalances on government press- relations," Temple University, 1994. Burrowes wrote this in the preface to his study:

Dunn as editor of the *Liberian Studies Journal* brought increased respectability to the field, made available his own wealth of resources on Liberia and agreed on short notice to serve as an outside reader on my dissertation committee.

Fynn Bruey's topic was "Gender Violence and the Rule of Law: Indigenous Communities in Post-War Liberia and Australia," Australian National University, 2019. As she accepted her first tenure-track position at Athabasca University in Canada, she wrote on LinkedIn a warm message of commendation to her mentors including me.

I also acquired two important manuscripts: One was the second volume of C. Abayomi Cassell's *Liberia: History of the First African Republic*, volume I, which was published in 1970, and the second was the "Memoir of Charles Dunbar Sherman (former Secretary of the Treasury and former Cape Mount County Senator)." I may well have acquired Sherman's manuscript through my associations with Boston University. In the case of Cassell's manuscript, I established contact with his publisher, Fountainhead Publishers, Inc., of New York and its director, Frances Robotti. For complex reasons, the press was folding in the late 1990s, and Mrs. Robotti packaged and sent to me the manuscript with her correspondence with Cassell dating from the 1960s. I have subsequently made the two manuscripts available to their rightful owners, the heirs, respectively, of the Cassell and Sherman families.

## My Scholarship

I situate my Liberia scholarship within two sets of literature: Liberian writers before me, and the more extensive literature by both Liberian and foreign authors. My time frame is the history of the African peoples from antiquity to the modern era of decolonization and independence consolidation. My motive for research and writing was a desire to better understand my country with a view to enhancing its development and hopefully contribute to the broader advancement of knowledge.

A theme that runs through my scholarship is that Liberia is not a binary country but one that started as an enclave state within a larger and complex community of African peoples. The “Declaration of Rights” in the country’s founding constitution proclaimed a national promise “to establish justice, ensure domestic peace, and promote the general welfare.” That promise was the expression of an ideal left to be perfected by succeeding generations of Liberians, including the present generation, for there are voices still clamoring to be heard. Like the making of nation-states everywhere, there were struggles toward the attainment of the ideal. Those struggles continue.

I hope I have broken new ground in some instances, and new contextual information and insights in others. My study on Liberia’s role in organizing African unity, and relations between the United States and Liberia might be cited here. My compilations may have proven useful to other scholars. My Episcopal Church histories have also been social histories, uncovering insights into what Jane Martin, for example, has called “The dual legacy: Government authority and mission influence among the Glebo of eastern Liberia.”

My scholarship developed over time. My first serious encounter with the literature in graduate school was not a critical one. My understanding and insights heightened over time, becoming on occasions a function of my experience. While I had formed a worldview and a certain perspective on Liberia, as I returned home to Liberia from nine years of study and work abroad, my six years in government service were also learning occasions. It was, however, during my 31 years at Sewanee, teaching, researching, and writing that my critical scholarship really took off. My consultancy work with the Sirleaf presidency may have benefitted the most from my now largely settled views.

In all this work, I see myself largely as a contributor to scholarship and not as a proponent of any grand design. At times, it has not been what I did but what I uncovered as needing to be done. We have a series of important monographs

on Liberia's ethnic communities written by non-Liberians. I have been urging Liberian scholars to review and make more visible that body of work. Whereas official Washington once relied on Liberianist scholars at Indiana and Northwestern Universities, people like me and my Liberian colleagues seem to have finally earned a place at American State Department briefings and Congressional hearings. I was among those who briefed US Ambassadors to Liberia Linda Thomas-Greenfield (2008–2012), Deborah R. Malac (2012–2015), and Christine A. Elder (2016–2020), as each of them prepared to take up their posts. My own country may have seen value in my scholarship, as I was invited on numerous occasions to contribute what we in Liberia often call “my quota” to national development.

## Liberia Engagement, 1981–2012 (and beyond)

Having covered my academic work during my time at Sewanee, I move now to focus on my Liberia-specific activities during the same period, 1981 through 2012. This might be characterized as my social and political activities. Though I was self-exiled and had found employment, I never disengaged from Liberia. I maintained my natural ties with relatives and friends at home. Although I lost my maternal grandparents in 1976 and 1977, my parents were still alive. For the purposes of this memoir, however, it is my ties with people such as Byron Tarr, T. Nelson Williams, Sr., Mary Antoinette Brown Sherman, Bishop George Daniel Browne, Kenneth Best, Jackson F. Doe, and no doubt many others that mattered most.

I communicated with varying degrees of regularity with these people, as we exchanged ideas on what was transpiring in state and society. With Tarr, the exchange was most intense, given his role, but also because we were working on a book together. Tarr was informally an advisor to the new military government, became minister of planning for a year, served as member of the National Constitution Commission, and then went into opposition politics, becoming secretary general of LAP. And in the aftermath of the 1985 elections, when he perhaps naively thought that LAP's win of the presidency would be legitimized, he told me that President-elect Jackson Doe wanted me to return home to join his government: "return to your old job" as minister of state for presidential affairs was the precise indication. Alas, that was not to be, given Samuel Doe's maneuvers that awarded himself the prize instead. Byron was soon in trouble following the foiled Quiwonkpa coup later in 1985. He soon joined me in exile and became deeply involved with the disparate opposition forces that eventually brought down the Doe regime.

Through Byron, I came to know a thing or two about the struggles for power in Liberia during this period. Byron was always on the move. I took what information he volunteered to me, never probing, though I sensed the effort was underway to remove Doe from power. Though I was formally a member of no group, I was in conversation with a wide range of people, including Elmer Johnson, the NPFL military officer, who was ambushed and killed early in the war, Harry Greaves, a Sirleaf aide, Sirleaf herself, Amos Sawyer, and others. These were only some of the characters on the eve of what became an NPLF-initiated insurgency, which would begin Christmas Eve 1989.



I visited Liberia once, in 1988, as part of a delegation of the Association of Episcopal Colleges to hold a meeting in Liberia and attend the installation of Dr. Melvin Mason as president of Cuttington University College. I went to Liberia at the invitation of my university president, Sewanee's Dr. Robert Ayres, who was a part of the delegation. Ayres wanted me to accompany him but only if I could do so safely. Though I checked and was told that I was on no blacklist, I trod cautiously for the duration of my brief stay. Apart from the opportunity to visit home for the first time in seven years, I was able to collect information for the first volume of my Episcopal Church history, which I was then working on in earnest.

The book that Byron and I had co-authored was released earlier that year, and I took a copy for my cousin-in-law, T. Nelson Williams, Sr. An appointment had been made for our delegation to call on President Doe at his Executive Mansion office. Shortly before the meeting, we learned that the President was otherwise engaged and we would see instead Vice President Harry Moniba, a fellow graduate of Cuttington's class of 1964. Moniba was an education major and a cum laude graduate. He was part of a small contingent of students from St. Augustine's High School of the Order of The Holy Cross in Lofa County. A Holy Cross report of the era headlined "Bolahun Students Sweep Awards at Cuttington Graduation." This was a tribute to the quality of education that the Order provided, as well as the caliber of the students themselves. At the Vice President's Capitol Building office before the meeting, I encountered my very good friend, who was then minister of information, Emmanuel Bowier. He greeted me in part with these words: "Did you bring copies of your book or were you afraid that we might seize them and seize you with them?" We otherwise accomplished our mission and returned safely to Sewanee.

The other part of my Liberia engagement while at Sewanee were ties of all sorts with the Diaspora Liberian community, as well as Americans interested in Liberia. This included colleagues in academia such as Similih Cordor, George Kieh, Augustine Konneh, Zamba Liberty, C. William Allen, Patrick Seyon, Carl Patrick Burrowes, James Teah Tarpeh, Benjamin Dennis, Flumo Stevens, and others. Included among my associates at this time were some former colleagues and friends from the 1970s. They included but were not limited to Earl Burrowes, Ezekiel Pajibo, Amos Sawyer, and Mary Antoinette Brown Sherman and her spouse, Ambassador George Flamma Sherman (after they fled Liberia in the mid-80s), Momo Rogers, Edward Binyah Kesselly (after he fled Liberia in wake of the Charles Taylor insurgency), Sylvanus Corker, Isaac Bantu, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, and others. As already indicated, I also came to know Elmer Glee Johnson, as he called me to talk about Liberian history, in which he had a keen interest. We spent hours on the phone before meeting him at a forum

on Liberian history at Virginia State University. Present were C. L. Simpson, Jr., a relative of Elmer's, Carl Patrick Burrowes, and C. William Allen, who was on the faculty of that institution. Following the forum, Elmer and I kept up our phone conversations, as he began writing and sending me things to edit. One day in early 1990, Elmer called and said simply that he was on his way to Liberia. He said I would hear from him once they were done with "the military operations." Soon I heard on the news that he was at the battle front with NPFL forces, where he quickly came to be considered a highly disciplined and effective military strategist, but as the NPFL forces were advancing on Monrovia, Elmer was ambushed and killed in June 1990. He was 33.

Though I maintained varying degrees of contact with all of the others, especially the Shermans and Pajibo (then at a Catholic justice and peace outfit in Washington, D.C.), I gravitated toward Sirleaf perhaps the most because of her political contacts and apparent access to valuable information. We developed a good working relationship, but the nature of our relationship was not the same as my relationship with Byron Tarr. Sirleaf generously shared with me information on what was happening in and about Liberia. As I noted earlier, her American assistant/secretary shared with me faithfully and on an almost daily basis news clippings and other information on Liberia.

Sirleaf and I were together part of a forum at the Carter Center of Emory University. We attended in Atlanta, Georgia, the Consultation of the International Negotiation Network: Resolving Intra-National Conflict: A Strengthened Role for Non-Governmental Actors. We agreed to work jointly on what came to be entitled "Liberia: An Action Memorandum." When the work was completed and submitted early in 1992, I received from Sirleaf the following letter:

Dear Elwood: I am enclosing check for \$250 received from the Carter Center, duly endorsed to you. As I indicated, you really carried more of the ball on this while I was away. Also enclosing copy of a memo ["furthering the Reconciliation and Peace Processes"], which I sent recently to Amos [Sawyer, then heading IGNU] in follow-up to memo we sent from Atlanta. Thanks for your participation in Saturday's meeting. If you have any ideas or suggestions to further develop this initiative, please pass on to me ... It is always a pleasure to talk and work with you. God bless. Ellen.

I was invited by the Carter Center and served on the Center's election observer teams to Sierra Leone in 2002, and to Ethiopia in 2005. In Addis, I had a brief encounter with President Jimmy Carter, during which I asked him about how the 1980 coup in Liberia was reported to him, given that he was the sitting US

president still. His quick response was: “It was reported to me as a tragedy!” Before I had a chance to follow-up, a surging crowd interrupted our exchange.

I associated with the Union of Liberian Associations in the Americas (ULAA) and an assortment of Liberian-community-based organizations that occasionally invited me to speak at their various functions. All of these activities enabled me both to socialize with Liberian communities in the US and to share my informed perspectives on the unfolding events in our native land, as we agonized over the bad news, rejoiced when there was good news, but always looked hopefully to a future when we might be privileged to contribute to the reconstruction and reconciliation of our country.

It was in the context of such engagements that I attended in Banjul, The Gambia, in 1990, a gathering of important Liberian political figures under the auspices of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). ECOWAS was attempting to create a civilian arm to facilitate the intervention of its ECOMOG forces in the Liberian civil war. In a planning meeting with others in Sirleaf’s Washington office, I was asked to serve as the group’s envoy to President Jawara of The Gambia prior to the meeting. When I politely declined, Dr. Levi Zangai came to fill that role, and subsequently served as a minister in the IGNU. I paid my own way and was in Banjul in my private capacity as a concerned Liberian. Always on the fringe, I heard of some of the people ambitious to lead an interim government: Sirleaf, General George Toe Washington, and Lutheran Bishop Ronald Diggs. Toe Washington expressed interest directly to me, though I had no standing and could not vote, not being a formal part of any of the groupings represented there. I thought Diggs a serious contender, though with no idea about the political baggage he carried. I came later to learn that as head of the Lutheran Church in Liberia, Diggs’ name was negatively associated with the Doe government massacre of some 600 innocent Liberians at the Lutheran Church in Monrovia early in 1990. Sawyer prevailed as I watched Bishop Michael Francis count the votes. Diggs was the second in number of votes, and so was by acclamation made deputy to Sawyer.

This led to the creation of an Interim Government of National Unity (IGNU) that came to be headed by Amos Sawyer. I was invited to Sawyer’s first round-table meeting along with Byron Tarr, Winston Tubman, Edward Keselly, Bacchus Matthews, and others. When the suggestion was made that I might join the team as they prepared to enter Monrovia, I responded, as I had on many such occasions, namely that I would do my Liberia service from my Sewanee base. Several months later, when President Doe had been killed and IGNU had been installed in Monrovia by ECOMOG, I was invited, through Tarr’s instrumentalities, to attend in Monrovia what was billed as an all-Liberia conference which

would bring together the two major contending forces of IGNU and NPRAG, the civilian arm of Taylor's NPFL. Taylor withdrew at the eleventh hour and torpedoed the effort. IGNU refreshed itself, dropped Bishop Diggs as interim vice president, and appointed Peter Naigow. The move to replace Diggs was at the insistence of Warlord Prince Johnson of the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia. Though I showed no interest in remaining to join the interim government, my ticket was reimbursed.

In mid-1991, I received a call from Harry Greaves, Jr. who was in Burkina Faso. He wanted me to join them at a meeting. I could not and so never came to know the details, though I would later read about it as part of Sirleaf's maneuvers about bringing sanity to some of Taylor's operations. Once Taylor came to Monrovia in 1996, and the process of preparing for the 1997 elections got underway, I took on the role of an observer far removed from the theater of action.

My keen interest in Liberia's fate, both at the level of scholarship and political engagement, propelled my involvement, perhaps following the foiled Quiwonkpa coup of 1985. I engaged with Liberians and friends of Liberia of a dazzling number of persuasions. My only interest was to see sanity restored to Liberia and the process of national reconciliation initiated. Though I was often encouraged to, I could not see myself playing any useful role as an active political player. The trauma of April 1980 had yet to dissipate. I had responsibilities in Sewanee. I would therefore continue my Liberia research and advocacy.

My Liberia-focused association also involved Americans who were part of Friends of Liberia: Svend Holsoe, Verlon and Ruth Stone, Kevin George, Jeanette Carter, Beverlee Bruce, Pat Riley, Sarah Morrison, Jane Martin, John Singler, Bill Seigman, Joseph Holloway, Tom Shick, Lester Monts, Mary Moran, and Jo Sullivan. There was a smaller contingent from the Friends of Cuttington: Seth C. Edwards, Jr., Arthur Ben Chitty, David Copley, Edward A. Holmes, and James Callaway. These fine people constituted in my mind at least a sort of informal lobby for a progressive Liberia in their interactions with both the American government at all its levels and interested bodies in American civil society. So, it was within the context of both the Liberian community organizations and the American friends of Liberia that I was privileged to speak to a wide and varied audience of Liberians and American friends of Liberia during the more than three decades that I was on the faculty at Sewanee.

In addition to the wide range of Liberian community organizations to which I was privileged to speak, including the Union of Liberian Associations in the Americas (ULAA), I once attempted the role of a public scholar with the publication in the popular press of at least two articles, one co-authored

with William E. Allen: “Mrs. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf is the 24<sup>th</sup> President: A Joint Statement by Dr. D. Elwood Dunn and Dr. William E. Allen on the Numerical Ranking of Liberian Presidents” (*The Perspective*, 12/23/05). The second article was “Presidential Power Transfer in Liberian History – Joseph Jenkins Roberts to Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.” (*The Daily Observer*, 9/19/17). Both articles were billed as teachable moments designed to correct critical historical records. In the first instance, the existing scholarship had ignored James S. Smith as successor president to Edward J. Roye, and thus the inaugural programs for President-elect Sirleaf were referring to her as the 23rd president of Liberia rather than the 24<sup>th</sup> president. In the second instance, the Liberian writer Helene Cooper had propagated that President Sirleaf’s then pending transfer of power in 2018 to her successor was the first peaceful transfer from one president to another in Liberian history, barring President Tubman’s succession of President Barclay in 1944. Judging from the many favorable comments the two articles elicited from Liberians, they seem to have served a useful purpose.

While living in the US, I was invited to participate in two US congressional hearings, one from the Senate Subcommittee on African Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Relations and the other from the House Subcommittee on African Affairs of the Committee on International Affairs. In September 1995, Senator Nancy Landon Kassebaum, Democrat of Kansas and subcommittee chair, invited me to testify at a hearing on “US policy toward Liberia.” The hearing was designed to focus on prospects for peace in Liberia with the signing in Abuja, Nigeria, of a peace agreement by the warring factions. I was part of a panel that included Janet Fleishman of Human Rights Watch and Jim Bishop, former US Ambassador to Liberia. Our panel followed witnesses that included Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs George Moose, Assistant Administrator for Africa of AID John Hicks, and Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for African Affairs Vince Kern.

Senator Kassebaum wrote to thank me for testifying, adding:

I very much valued your thoughtful contribution to the discussion at this important time. I share your belief that US leadership on this issue is critical. If the factions continue to cooperate, it is time for the international community to respond appropriately with support for the peace process. I have shared this view with the Administration and will continue to follow events in Liberia closely.

In one communication with the Senator, I raised an issue and sought her support. I wrote in October 1995:

I have been reliably informed about a number of positive actions by the US government in support of the peace process. However, it appears that those actions have not included funding consideration for an expanded ECOMOG – a vital ingredient for implementing the peace accord. The absence of confidence in ECOMOG's capacity for accountability seems to be the stumbling block.

I went on to suggest that one way to address ECOMOG's capacity for accountability was to ensure that all international assistance be made conditional. And then I concluded:

In the event my information is accurate, I would appreciate whatever you could do to cause the councils of the US government to meaningfully address the issue of international funding for an expanded ECOMOG in Liberia.

When in late November I received the news that Senator Kassebaum had decided not to seek re-election to her Senate seat, I wrote to express understanding and to renew my "thanks and appreciation for the service you have rendered, as a US Senator, to the people of Africa, especially those of the Republic of Liberia." I thought that was the end of the matter until I received, in late January 1996, a warm letter that began:

Dear Professor Dunn: Your kind words are so appreciated.  
 [And then this:] The holidays are but a memory now, but I'd still like to share the good advice in an old English prayer:  
 Take time to be friendly –  
 It is the road to happiness.  
 Take time to dream –  
 It is hitching your wagon to a star.  
 Take time to love and be loved –  
 It is the privilege of the gods.  
 Take time to look around –  
 It is too short a day to be selfish.  
 Take time to laugh –  
 It is the music of the soul.  
 May each day of the New Year be richly blessed with happiness, dreams,  
 and the wonderful gift of laughter.  
 Warmest regards,  
 Nancy Landon Kassebaum, United States Senator

The second Congressional Hearing in which I participated was the House Subcommittee on Africa of the Committee on International Affairs. I spoke on the continuing conflict in Liberia on June 26, 1996, against the backdrop of the eruption in April and May of armed combat in Monrovia involving factions that were part of the Transitional Government. The same day, I was interviewed on National Public Radio (NPR) program “Talk of the Nation.”

In response to the two seminal crisis moments of 1990 and 2003, respectively, I made two TV appearances. On August 6, 1990, I appeared on the MacNeil/Lehrer Report/PBS News Hour to discuss “Liberia – Power Struggle” at start of the Charles Taylor insurgency. On the show with me were the US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Herman Cohen and Joyce Mends-Cole, a Liberian Attorney and UN official.

At the end of the civil war, PBS again invited me, interestingly, on August 6, 2003, to discuss “The historical relationship between the United States and Liberia and the implications of that in the current crisis.” Former US Ambassador to Liberia Edward Perkins and American historian Marie Tyler-McGraw joined me on the PBS panel. Many were heartened by the decisive action of President George W. Bush, insisting that Taylor leave the country. August 6 was also the day a small group of US Marines began operations to provide logistical support to African peacekeeping troops in Liberia. Five days later, on August 11, President Taylor resigned and departed for exile in Nigeria on August 12.

I was heartened by some of the commendations about my TV appearance that came from friends and my students. My old college professor, Dr. John Gay, thought I had done a “good job last night,” adding, “We appreciated the maturity and sensibility with which you approached Liberia’s peculiar history.” One of my former Sewanee students, Laura Somel, wrote a long email message, part of which reads excitingly:

Dr Dunn! You were on TV! There I was sitting in my apartment after a long day at work and of course I go to my favorite channel, PBS, and you were sitting there talking!!! You did a great job by the way and the use of the paradigm helped explain the brief history you were able to relay. I felt I was back in class or sitting in your office discussing these terribly important issues ...

This was a busy time for me. I appeared in a series of syndicated radio interviews on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). These took place on August 11, 2003, three days after the TV appearance. I remember going from one interview to the other, covering radio stations in Whitehorse, Calgary,



Ottawa, Edmonton, Yellowknife, Halifax, Quebec City, Regina, Vancouver, St. John's (NFLD), Montreal, and Winnipeg. I was exhausted but felt I was truly doing something "in the cause of the people." I did additional interviews for Radio France International; BBC Radio world news; South China Morning Post; CPSA Radio, Berkeley, California; and with fellow Liberian Emira Woods on KPFA Radio in Berkeley.

## Summary of Academic Career

One of the things I liked about the trio expectations at Sewanee is that of its inclusive teaching, service to community, and scholarly engagements. They were broad enough to allow a very wide range of activities, which were, all of them, mutually reinforcing. My four earlier years at Seton Hall (1970–1974) were no different, though I was then just starting and feeling my way in the first couple of years. Then came real stints of teaching at Cuttington and UL, and finally the more than three decades at Sewanee.

I was coming from a life experience that seemed to prepare me for my chosen career. It was a focused life that took me from the God-centered training or upbringing of my maternal grandparents, through St. Peter Claver's Catholic School, Bassa High School graduation in 1960, and Cuttington College and Divinity School, graduating in 1964. Study abroad climaxed my formal education, and then a career beacons. I was able, by the grace of God, to step forward using my God-given talents. They were not large, but something was there: Aren't we all given something from the giver of all good gifts? What matters then, is what we do with whatever talent we are endowed with by our creator.

Through the years, it has been important to keep a moral compass, to believe in oneself, and, with an ethic of hard work, to apply oneself. I have gravitated towards those who accept my humanity and avoided those who have not. I strove never to ignore the humanity of another. I have always tried to prepare myself, for I know that opportunities come to the prepared. I have tried never to rest on my laurels, for I know that I would be asked to produce the latest of value in my line of work. I tried conscientiousness; good people came my way and helped me along.

Because of the scope and intensity of my engagement with Liberians and Liberia for the duration of my decades at Sewanee, as I retired, I was able to easily transition to a continuing, even more robust engagement. But my new, perhaps renewed engagement was enhanced when Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was elected to the presidency of Liberia in 2005. This event in my mind raised hopes that all was not lost and that Liberia could rise from the ashes of fratricidal conflict and the deepening social cleavages that was its bi-product.

Since I took the job in Sewanee, it had always been my hope that upon retirement enough life would be left in me to continue my service to Liberia. And so, as I approached my third decade of service to Sewanee, I informed the Dean of

the College of my intention to retire. But our younger son, Sedar, had about a year more to complete his MBA. Sedar was the last of our four children. He was born during my time in Sewanee, November 18, 1987. I did not feel comfortable retiring before he completed his graduate degree, so I stayed on an extra year, making my retirement effective at the end of the spring semester of 2012.

Dean John Gatta was gracious as he expressed “heartfelt appreciation” for my “many years of dedicated service to this institution.” He continued: “You will surely be missed within the ranks of our full-time professors.” He added his hope that my remaining time at Sewanee would be “a satisfying endpoint” of my career, and that I would “discover new paths of fruitful experience as you enter the next phase of your life.”

As I departed Sewanee, I became the recipient of a Sewanee time-honored tradition of resolutions of appreciation to departing faculty. An elaborate “Resolution of Appreciation” was presented to me at the last faculty meeting of the academic year, accompanied by a standing ovation from my faculty colleagues. This was coupled with a gift of a rocking chair with the inscription: “D. Elwood Dunn, Alfred Walter Negley Professor of Political Science, The University of the South, 1981–2012.” My political science colleagues wrote on a “thank you” card: “For all that you have done for your colleagues, students, University, and country over these more than 30 years.” The faculty resolution itself begins:

Whereas it is difficult to sum up more than thirty years of scholarship, teaching, and service in a brief resolution, what follows is the political science department’s attempt to convey our esteem and good wishes for our colleague Elwood Dunn. Elwood’s negotiating skills, self-effacing character, dignity, and integrity are respected and will be fondly remembered by the Sewanee community and diplomatic circles in the United States and Liberia.”

The resolution ends:

Today, we honor Elwood Dunn’s many accomplishments and contributions to his students, to his colleagues and to his native country of Liberia. Please rise and join me in expressing our sincerest gratitude for over thirty years of extraordinary service.

Individual notes from colleagues and students were compiled and given to me in a scrapbook. Faculty colleague Andrea Hatcher wrote: “I will long remember

your dignity, grace and comfort to this junior faculty member. I wish you a long and happy life after Sewanee.” Charles Brockett:

I wish you much success and fulfillment as you continue on your scholarship and with the many other ways that you have so effectively served the best interest of Liberia and the Liberian community in this country. It would please me ... to know you within the context that has always been so important to who you are.”

Robert Keele wrote: “For over 30 years you have been a congenial colleague, a respected teacher, and an accomplished scholar. Well done good and faithful servant.

There was more from some of my students: Joe Wiegand (class of 1987):

I join with others in celebrating your many years of service to Sewanee and to the hundreds of students who have taken your courses. As well, I know that you will never really quit your life-long passion to teach, to learn and to write and share, and, in the words of the Boy Scouts, to ‘leave your campgrounds cleaner than you found it’

Randolph Horn (class of 1987): “Despite the storms in his own life, Professor Dunn seemed consistently to embody the charge from the baptismal Covenant ‘to respect the dignity of every human being.’”

Alyna Jace Rogow (class of 2008): “Professor Dunn was the teacher who stoked my curiosity, unknowingly lit a path for me, and made me realize my potential.” Jennifer Juma (class of 2010 & Nigerian): “I am very grateful for all the times you inspired, guided, and motivated me to be a successful African woman.” Sidney Short (class of 2001): “Professor Dunn’s advice led me to Washington, D.C., and to the Pentagon, and ultimately to a successful life and career.” And my student and constant friend from Puerto Rico, David Roman (class of 1988): “Thank you for your positive influence in my life. I wish you the best in your future endeavors.”

## Focus on Rebuilding Post Civil War Liberia

As I contemplated retirement, my agenda was clear: research and service to Liberian communities at home and in the Diaspora. Because I never disengaged from Liberia, the transition from Sewanee affairs to Liberian affairs was smooth. As noted earlier, I had travelled to Liberia in 2000 to visit my mother's grave. That trip gave me a "feel" for Taylor's Liberia. Despite his "election" in 1997, reportedly with 75% of the vote, with many of his exuberant youthful supporters exclaiming "He killed my ma, he killed my pa, I still vote for him," my distinct impression was that Taylor's was an imposter regime foisted on the Liberian people by "force majeure." Less than three years later, Taylor was out of office and out of Liberia on the verge of facing international justice. He is now serving a fifty-year sentence for war crimes and crimes against humanity in a British prison.

As I thought about the future, I knew I would seek opportunities to do my part in helping Liberia transition from a country wracked by civil strife and the tyranny of warlords to a nation blessed by peace and moving towards normalcy, however defined. The evolution of my thinking about Liberia was at a stage that I had become careful in my use of concepts and nomenclatures that had gained currency in the Liberia literature. For example, I refer to the Black immigrants from the new world as "repatriates," and the indigenous Africans as "indigenes." I was obviously not unaware of the use and misuse of nomenclature in Liberian studies. My observation on the subject is a function of my lived experience and a product of my archival research work. At the archives of the Episcopal Church in Austin, Texas, I noted the contexts in which early nineteenth-century American missionaries in Liberia dutifully reported to their home offices a description of the peoples under their charge in Liberia as *natives, colonists, and missionaries* (white or negro). There were many permutations of the "congo" and "country" nomenclatures that eventually resulted in the dichotomy of indigenes and immigrants that many now use to think of Liberians and their country. My interest lies in bridging all social cleavages that the Liberian experience has produced. I am also interested in a nuanced approach that questions and thus takes away the product of villains and heroes. In addition to the duality, I am also aware of the more nuanced reality of a cultural mix, of a hybrid of indigenous and repatriate Liberians. President Tubman once described his Secretary of State J. Rudolph Grimes and Secretary of the Treasury Charles Sherman as 50/50 to characterize the mix. He might

have included his first Vice President, C.L. Simpson, who has himself written in his memoir, "Symbol of Liberia," of his own 50/50 status.

And then there is a whole body of information about key players on the national stage in the 1970s. What do we know about the leadership, as well as the rank and file of such social movements of that period as MOJA and PAL? Who was Gabriel Bacchus Matthews? Who is Amos Sawyer? Who is Dew Mayson? What do we know about the foot soldiers of these and other movements? Who were some of the people supporting the social justice causes of Albert Porte, or those of Judge Emma Shannon Walser? At a MOJA rally in Monrovia, perhaps in 1979, someone shouted from the crowd to Dr. Tipoteh, intending to raise an ethnic issue: "Who is Amos Sawyer?" so the question went. To which Tipoteh blandly replied, "Sawyer is from Sinoe County."

My interest lies in bridging and mitigating differences, as Liberians work toward national reconciliation induced by both the coup d'état of 1980 and the civil war that followed. In this pursuit, I employ the term repatriate because the return was in fact to one's ancestral home. In this pursuit I also engage opportunities deliberately designed to forge a national Liberian identity embedded in the mosaic that many have recognized as constituting the Liberian people. I sought opportunities against the foregoing historical backdrop. My remedy for the reconciliation problematic is to seek opportunities and agencies to address the inequities of the immediate and distant past, as well as the exacerbation of inequalities and the social impact of the violence of war.

The first opportunity came in the context of post-civil war Liberia when I chaired a 2003 meeting looking toward Liberia's post-conflict future. This was a continuation of private efforts on the part of Liberians attending the annual meeting in 2000 of the Liberian Studies Association at Delaware State University. Discussing the prevailing situation in Liberia, a number of us decided to prepare an "issues document" and determine later what to do with it. Among those present, in addition to the regulars of the LSA, were Charles W. Brumskine, who later became a candidate for the Liberian presidency, former Vice President Harry Moniba, who was later killed in an automobile accident, journalist Kenneth Best, and Mills Jones, who also later became a presidential contender.

Other opportunities would follow. These included rescuing and preserving priceless Liberian historical records, chairing a group investigating serious charges of high-level corruption, delivering the 2012 national oration, serving on a national constitution review committee, leading the effort to review Liberia's national symbols, and associating with the effort to write an inclusive history of Liberia. I also participated in the Vision 2030 project. I will now treat each of the foregoing in sequence.

## 1 Looking toward Liberia's Post-Conflict Future

The 2003 Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement effectively ending years of carnage meant that serious Liberians could begin thinking and planning for the future. Of course, this idea did not suddenly dawn upon Liberians. In a real sense, serious thinking about reform dates in recent times to at least the 1970s. Those efforts were aborted by the 1980 coup. The coup situation threw up challenges of its own, and this was immediately met with the process of writing a new constitution. The new constitution led to problematic elections in 1985, followed by a coup attempt, the suppression of which sowed the seeds that germinated in the civil war. Each of these unsettling events created occasions for Liberian professionals and politicians at home and abroad to assemble and ponder. Now that the war was over, a number of us Liberians approached the Carter Center, which agreed to facilitate a meeting to be hosted by the Woodrow Wilson Center in the strategic town of Washington, D.C. The meeting was designed to allow Liberian professionals and politicians the opportunity to place before international partners a reform agenda or some sense of what some thoughtful Liberians were thinking about the future of their country. Surely the facilitators of the meeting understood that some of the people in the room would come to hold public office.

In November 2003, I was asked to chair the meeting in Washington after I had flown from Atlanta with officials of the Carter Center. I kept a list of the participants, which bears the caption: "Toward A Liberian Reform Agenda." The Liberian participants were: C. William Allen (became Information Minister), Philip Banks (became a justice of the Supreme Court), Kenneth Best (proprietor of the *Daily Observer* newspaper), Al-Hassan Conteh (became president of the University of Liberia), D. Elwood Dunn, Tiawon Gongloe (became solicitor general of Liberia), Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Mills Jones (became governor of the Central Bank of Liberia), Mydea Reeves-Karpeh (Liberian educator in the Diaspora), Amos Sawyer, Byron Tarr, and Cletus Wortorson (became a senator).

The international partners attending were: Ozong Agborsangaya (National Democratic Institute), Joan Condon (US House International Relations Committee), Tom Crick (Carter Center), Denise Dauphine (USAID), Michael Dilberti, Sr. (World Bank), Jeff Krilla (International Republican Institute), John Langlois (USAID), Jeremy Levitt (DePaul Univ.), Gordon Streeb (Carter Center), James Viray (IRI), and Howard Wolpe (Woodrow Wilson Center). I largely facilitated the meeting, which saw most of the Liberians making remarks. A World Bank or IMF official asked me privately why I did not make substantive remarks, and I said I saw my role as a facilitator. I was comfortable not taking center stage, for I had no political ambition. C. William Allen spoke up as a member



of Chairman Gyude Bryant's team. He subsequently became the information minister. Conteh, whom Bryant later appointed president of the University of Liberia, wondered to me in private why Sirleaf, though already present in the building, seemed to play down the gathering, as she showed up at the tail end of the meeting and then sat in an obscure seat. My one-word response to Conteh was "politics." Ambition was being cautious. In terms of what was achieved, the partners heard from some of the future political players, and the Liberian planning group mandated me, Tarr, and Conteh to draft a document incorporating some of what was said at the meeting but also drawing upon ideas from earlier efforts for the consideration of an expanded Liberian group. This we proceeded to do, as I have on my computer drafts exchanged among us drafters. I do not recall what followed, though under other auspices there was call for a national conference before the 2005 election, but that did not materialize. The initiative was now in the hands of the politicians who were now seeking public office.

## 2 Rescuing and Preserving Priceless Liberian Records

As peace returned to Liberia in the wake of the Accra Peace Agreement of 2003, I found myself teaming up the following year with colleagues at Indiana University, where the nucleus of what is now known as the Liberian Collections Project was established. Preserving Liberian archives of all sorts and conditions became my new passion. I had heard horror stories about the Liberian national archives being broken into and papers strewn in the streets of Monrovia, some used to wrap food items sold in makeshift markets in the city. We worked with the authorities of the National Archives, at one point in 2004 encountering resistance from interim Foreign Minister Yaya Nimley, who apparently thought I was trying to acquire government documents for my possession. I also had in mind the impressive Tubman papers that I had briefly worked with during my time on the faculty of the University of Liberia in late 1980. Along with Verlon Stone, I made several trips between 2004 and 2005 to do what we could to restore the national archives. With the assistance of my wife, Matilda, who approached Shad Tubman on our behalf and the eventual consent of the Tubman family, we prepared what remained of the entire collection of Tubman's papers, photographs included, and had them shipped to Indiana University for professional cleaning and digitizing.

While performing the task at the Tubman Totota estate, it occurred to me that there were other valuable papers that also needed to be rescued. In time, they came to include the papers, respectively, of Episcopal Bishop George

D. Browne, E. Reginald Townsend and Evelyn Townsend, A. Romeo Horton, and Bai T. Moore. I had made forays into researching church history in the 1980s when I visited in Austin, Texas, the archives of the American Episcopal church, resulting in the 1992 published history of the church. It was during this period of research that I came to learn of Bishop Browne's inclinations toward historical research. The Browne family accepted our argument that the valuable Browne papers could best be secured at the Austin archives. The latter obliged and bore the cost of shipping the papers as boxed by our IU team.

We lobbied with Interim Chairman Gyude Bryant for the purpose-built national archives in Sinkor to be returned to its rightful owner, given that it had been occupied by the government's National Investment Commission since 1997. Bryant promised to include the issue of the return in a memo to his successor, which he may have done, for eventually the Center for National Documentation and Library Services (National Archives) was able to claim its building and begin important restorative work of acquiring and storing all state papers, in addition to its other statutory responsibilities.

I first viewed the papers of Bai T. Moore, a Liberian culture icon during a visit to his Sinkor Old Road home with Edward Kesselly in the early 1980 post-coup period. Everything was intact. Now, in the post-war period with Bai T. dead, we entered a study that had been sealed for years. With the consent of Mrs. Gillian Tulay Moore, we retrieved what we could of the rodent- and roach-infested documents, rare books, and artifacts.

Together with the Townsend and Horton papers, all of these valuable research materials were boxed and shipped to Indiana University. At one point, when back in the US, Stone and I became treasure hunters as we made an unsuccessful effort to acquire the papers of Angie Brooks Randolph, a Liberian diplomat and former Supreme Court Justice. The entire effort of acquiring the papers of prominent Liberians was enabled through a grant to IU from the Endangered Archives Programme of the British Library. The effort lasted for five years. We entered into agreements with the heirs of each collection that the original papers would be returned to Liberia, once professional cleaning and digitizing were completed.

Dr. Verlon Stone was the chief facilitator from Indiana University, while I served as a negotiator, along with my wife Matilda in the case of the Tubman family, with the various families, all of whom I knew personally. Verlon and I congratulated each other in 2009 email messages. As I commended him for the expertise and commitment he brought to our common endeavor and his role, I told him that it was "tomorrow's Liberia that will more fully feel the impact of your singular contributions toward preserving a key feature of the nation's heritage." He reciprocated: "Thanks for your kind words, but you were

always the sparkplug for getting projects started and for making the most effective contacts using the smoothest and most gentle words. I feel we made a great team as nothing would have started or continued without your hand being in it.”

### 3 Investigating Corruption

Actually, the first concrete task I carried out for President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was to lead an investigation into email revelations of alleged improprieties on the part of government officials in the two-year old Sirleaf administration. I was approached by President Sirleaf to lead this investigation, which lasted for about four months in 2008.

I was in Liberia engaged in my academic research and occasionally checking in with the Governance Commission about our project that was apparently in abeyance. My mobile phone rang early one afternoon as I sat in the Café at Royal Hotel in Sinkor. The caller said: “Dr. Dunn, the President wants to speak to you.” Surprised, I of course obliged, and soon Sirleaf began to speak: “I did not know you were in country. I would like to see you.” I said, “Of course, but when?” She said, “Now!” I replied, “The only problem is that I did not dress today thinking I would see the President of Liberia.” She said, “Your dress doesn’t matter. Please come.” I replied that I was on my way, as I shut down my computer and headed out the door.

The President saw me shortly after I arrived at her office. We greeted and exchanged pleasantries. Getting down to business, she said, I am sure you have heard all this noise in the press about email exchanges and corruption allegations. Sirleaf was referring to news reports about email exchanges acquired from the news organ, *Front Page Africa*, that senior government officials were engaged in activities that smacked of conflict of interests and corruption relative to renegotiating the agreement between government and the Liberian International Ship and Corporate Registry (LISCR).

LISCR, an American based company, had since the 1940s acted on behalf of the Liberian government to issue Liberian registry for large ocean-going vessels. Because ships need not be registered in their country of ownership, many sail under so-called flags of convenience. Given its favorable maritime labor, safety, and tax laws, Liberia ranks second only to Panama in providing flags of convenience. Today, more than 10% of large boats worldwide, including more than one-third of tankers importing oil into the US, fly the Liberian standard. Registering commercial vessels has long been an important source of revenue for Liberia, generating approximately \$20 million in hard currency each year.

Unfortunately, some well-placed Liberians saw the occasion of renegotiating the LISCR agreement as an opportunity for personal benefit to the detriment of the government. *Front Page Africa* had attempted to shine a light on this situation.

Referring to the most recent allegations, Sirleaf told me that someone advised her that I could lead a small team to carefully look into the matter with a view to separating fact from fiction. I listened intently, wondering what meaning there was to what I was hearing. Given my standing commitment to help my country whenever I could, I was inclined to agree to the President's request and told her I would need to "sleep on it," but that in any case I would return to her with the names of Liberians of integrity who could constitute the investigating team.

Upon leaving the President's office, I set to work immediately thinking about designing the project and the people likely to help me. I returned to her a day later with some vague ideas about a design but with the following names for membership on the proposed commission. I had spoken with and secured the consent of the following persons: Roman Catholic Sister Mary Laurene Browne (President, Stella Maris Polytechnic University), the Rev. Dr. Herman Browne (Episcopal priest), Dr. Ruth Doe (retired educator), Bill Frank Enoanyi (retired veteran journalist), the Rev. Dr. James Sellee (Episcopal priest), and Laurence C. Norman (prominent engineer).

Before I left for the US, where I would complete my organizing for the project, I took my proposed list to the President. I watched closely her body language as she looked at my short list. She seemed visibly impressed, thinking I had put together a team likely to be trusted by the Liberian public. The timing was perfect, as I would soon be on sabbatical from Sewanee and could afford to spend the months required to do the project. We talked finance and *modus operandi* before I took leave of her.

Returning to the US, I contacted Rodney Sieh, Managing Editor of *FPA* that had secured the compromising emails, and broke the news story. I also contacted two Liberian lawyers, the youthful Counselor Jallah Barbu, then affiliated with Indiana University Law School, and Counselor Mohamedu Jones, a graduate of Harvard Law. I also thought I needed a reputable American or international law firm to complete our team of investigators. At a social function in Sewanee at the residence of my university president, I met the prominent Washington attorney, with ties to Sewanee, Harry Mcpherson of *DLA Piper*. I immediately began courting him by explaining to him briefly the project. We agreed to meet in Washington with some of his law firm colleagues. The firm included lawyers in "white collar criminal practice." Mohamedu Jones accompanied me to the meeting, where unfortunately we discovered that one

of the firm's attorneys had had some business dealings with one of the principal parties mentioned in the email exchanges under investigation. The firm therefore declined any further discussion, but having understood more fully the nature of the contemplated investigation, recommended a firm of forensic investigators called The James Mintz Group, Inc., of Washington, D.C.

Before returning to Liberia to establish the commission, I consulted with Rodney Sieh, Jallah Barbu, Mohamedu Jones, and Jim Rowe of The James Mintz Group Inc. A problem developed before I traveled. Sieh published in his paper that the details of a meeting we held in a hotel room in New Jersey had been sent to someone in Monrovia in a way that compromised the integrity of our effort before we even got started. The news report insinuated that Jones might have been the culprit, which Jones categorically denied. Sieh threatened to withdraw his cooperation with the effort, which he did, though we were able in time to acquire from him a measure of cooperation.

Back in Liberia, I began work on logistics: secretarial help, office space, transportation. The President provided initial financing, as we informed her about the Mintz Group and their financial requirements. The fallout from Sieh's new allegations about our own leaking of privileged information was such that Sirleaf at one point wondered whether we were capable of going forward with the investigation. Though we seriously doubted the allegations against Jones, but not wanting to distract from the task at hand, we decided to compensate Jones for services rendered and discontinued his service as we proceeded with the work. Though the President had addressed to me a letter setting forth terms of reference of sorts, it became clear early on that we needed clearer legal authority to conduct the investigation. Executive Order No. 15 became that authority:

Establishment of an Ad Hoc Independent Commission to Investigate alleged improprieties by certain officials of Government in Reference to Email Exchanges on the Website of FrontpageAfrica.Com relative to The Government of Liberia and LISCR Negotiations.

Against the backdrop of the allegations and concerned that, if true, the allegations would constitute violations of government policies and Liberian penal laws, making perpetrators liable to criminal prosecution, the executive order stated that it was in the best interest of the government and people of Liberia "that an independent, fair and expeditious inquiry be conducted into the publications of the allegations set forth." For these reasons an ad hoc independent commission "of seven Liberians of integrity, deemed impartial and

independent, is hereby established to fully investigate and probe into alleged improprieties,” and

that Dr. D. Elwood Dunn is hereby appointed chair of the Ad Hoc Commission. That the Chair ... is hereby authorized and empowered to appoint independently the other six persons to serve on the Commission, as well as engage and employ the services of experts and legal counsel, local and international, and including experts in information technology, deemed to be necessary and as may be required to facilitate the commission's work.

After completing the work, we prepared a confidential report, which we submitted only to President Sirleaf. Under the heading “Observations,” the report noted that the seven-member commission, assisted by a US-based computer forensic investigative firm and a Liberian lawyer, had conducted its work from October 2008 through January 2009. During that time, the commission had examined three sets of emails, those published in *Front Page Africa*, unpublished emails provided by the paper's editor Rodney Sieh, and documents relative to allegations of corruption. The documents came from Sieh and other individuals. In addition, the commission had interviewed individuals and investigated entities mentioned in the allegations of corruption or other improprieties. Finally, the report noted that a technical forensic team had conducted a review and analysis of five hard drives acquired from some of the interviewees and from the Liberian International Ship and Corporate Registry.

In evaluating the emails, the report noted that some of the compromising messages had not been contested or disputed. Others had been disputed, while still others were clearly false. The report further stated that some of the individuals alleged to have been involved in improprieties regarding the contract negotiations between LISCOR and the government of Liberia refused to cooperate with the commission. It must be assumed, the report noted, they resisted because information obtained from them would not be favorable to them.

The next section of the report, labeled “Findings,” noted that there were violations and breaches of Liberian laws and policies by government officials, private individuals, and private business entities. However, the commission stated that Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Minister of Justice Philip A.Z. Banks, and Bureau of Maritime Affairs Commissioner Binyah C. Kesselly had not engaged in any acts of impropriety regarding the LISCOR negotiations. Allegations made in the emails suggesting malfeasance on their part were not based on evidence and “in fact appeared to have been fabricated and were unknown to those individuals until they appeared on the website of *Front Page Africa*.”

Given the time-limit of our investigation but also the nature of some of the issues we faced, our recommendations included the appointment of a special prosecutor, and the use of the government's own Anti-Corruption Commission to pursue issues that we inconclusively investigated. Others of our recommendations included the following: that for the use of their public offices and titles for transacting private businesses and in order to deter such behavior, two officials of President Sirleaf's staff be reprimanded, and that the President herself exercise caution in supporting private business ventures for members of the national legislature.

The Commission publicly presented its report to the President in the presence of the press. She thanked us and, as she was about to travel, promised she would study and then release the report to the public. Along with the report we submitted a financial report that detailed the total amount we received of approximately \$266,000, amount spent on the Mintz Group of \$161,000, and amount spent on our operations of about \$82,000. There was a balance of \$23,000, which we duly returned to the government.

I was now engaged in closing offices, passing office equipment to the Justice Ministry to complete investigation of certain issues we did not complete. Counselor Barbu and I personally took a copy of the sealed report, with all documents generated, and handed them to the Director General of the National Archives to be deposited for future use, and as a reference for those interested in the fine details of our work. And we were done. The public knew now what we had done procedurally, not substantively, for the report was now in the hands of only President Sirleaf.

And then came a bombshell! Rodney Sieh acquired, and his FPA published, internal reports sent to us by our employee, the Mintz Group, which had done the forensic investigation. The point of his publication was to draw a comparison between our final report and some of the raw material of the Mintz Group's submissions to us. Though surprised and disappointed, I chose to walk away from the political intrigues that I thought Sieh's action represented. Sirleaf returned home from her trip abroad, called a press conference where she highlighted the report, took questions from the press in a contentious atmosphere, and attempted to end there her government's direct engagement with the matter. By then, I was back at my Sewanee base, having completed the controversial email saga investigation.

The following year, 2009, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) released its report. It was a bombshell of another sort! It sought to indict the major warlords of the civil war, as well as impose public sanctions upon a number of leading politicians, including the sitting President of Liberia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. My role in the TRC process was to provide a testimony during



the “Thematic and Institutional Hearings,” and also as a consultant on issues of historical antecedents to the conflict. The TRC report in 2009 included President Sirleaf on a list of 50 Liberians to be subject to public sanctions for their association “with former warring factions, their leaders, political-decision-makers, financiers, organizers, commanders.” Sirleaf was thus “barred from holding public office, elected or appointed for a period of thirty (30) years.”

The Supreme Court of Liberia entered the deliberations and made a declaratory judgment in a case, which exonerated Sirleaf. In the case of *Williams v Tah et al* [2011] LRSC 12 (21 January 2011, the Court declared as unconstitutional “section 48 of the TRC Act, in so far as it makes mandatory the implementation of a TRC decision or recommendation, where a fundamental provision of the Constitution, such as the due process of law clause, has been violated, and where the implementation of the TRC decision or recommendation would result in an obvious further violation of the constitution ...” Consequently, the TRC’s charge against Sirleaf found exoneration in a judgment of the Supreme Court, so that any social blemish on Sirleaf seems now left to the judgment of history.

#### 4 Delivering the National Oration in 2012

In the first year of Sirleaf’s second term, I was invited to deliver the traditional national oration on July 26, 2012. I had often been in touch with Sirleaf’s office for one thing or the other. She had just visited the US, when I received a call that she was trying to reach me, but I thought it was about a matter that I had settled with one of her officials. I was told that, on the contrary, the President wanted to speak to me herself. Now from her office in Monrovia while I was in my office in Sewanee, the caller said: “Dr. Dunn, the President would like to speak with you.” She came on, we greeted, and then she said: “I would like for you to deliver this year’s July 26<sup>th</sup> national oration.” My immediate reaction was “wow!” I then said thanks for the consideration but I would like to discuss it with my family and get back to her office in short order. I then reminded her that the late President Tolbert had me perform a similar national service in July 1979. Her reaction: “I see no problem with that, this is a new regime ...” The conversation ended, I called Matilda and we agreed I should accept. It was perhaps a couple of hours later that I called Monrovia and confirmed my acceptance of the President’s invitation.

It was my pleasure to have Matilda and two of our children, Germaine and Sedar, in Liberia for the occasion. Delivering the oration is a coveted platform to “face the nation” and set forth one’s own views on the challenges

and opportunities facing the country. In my address, I called on the nation to pause and re-calibrate, given all that had transpired since 1979. My topic was “Renewing Our National Promise.” I cited from our founding constitution’s “Declaration of Rights” or national purpose “To establish justice, ensure domestic peace, and promote the general welfare.” I suggested that these were ideals left to be perfected by succeeding generations of Liberians.

I addressed the topic in two parts: contextualizing our national experience and highlighting the role of values in national development. One effect of what I had to say in the oration was a heightening of my involvement with governance-related issues. In fact, during her own remarks that Independence Day, President Sirleaf asked me publicly to consider leading yet another project. The project was to review Liberia’s national symbols of flag, seal, national awards, and national anthem. I was asked to undertake this assignment in part because of my critical stance toward national awards that I considered not nationally representative enough. Because I had refused the offer of a national award, I was honored instead with a traditional award of being gowned by the National Council of Chiefs and Elders.

From a few fellow Liberians at home and abroad, I received messages of congratulations. The Dean of Trinity Episcopal Cathedral, the Rev. Dr. Herman Browne, wrote: “A most extraordinary address. Very well delivered with style and effect. You’ve charted a path ...” A writer and literary figure, Professor K-Moses Nagbe wrote: “O that concrete steps would be established at once to begin implementing your timely proposals. Notwithstanding, may your voice and those of others similarly passionate never cease. Congratulations again for minting a vision which must not be ignored.” The Liberian Ambassador to Nigeria, Dr. Al-Hassan Conteh: “I just finished reading your “26” Oration, a magnum opus, for which I’d like to most sincerely congratulate you ...” Economist Geepu Nah Tiepoh of Canada thought the speech would “be remembered as a major contribution to the road map for Liberia’s development.” Writer Stephanie Horton wrote: “The speech stirred emotions long dormant within me to life. It articulates my deepest impulses and dreams. May we see the dream bear fruit in our lifetime.” And physician Mardia Stone wrote: “I believe it is the best July 26 oration ... He covered all grounds and said all that must be said if this nation is to move forward.”

## 5 The Constitution Review Committee

I was probably invited to be a part of constitutional review because of remarks I had made about our Organic Law in my July 26, 2012, national oration. I was

critical of the 1986 Constitution, under which Liberia labored and continues to labor, because of the less than healthy circumstances that produced it. In 1983, a group of prominent and respected Liberians headed by Amos Sawyer and including former Secretary of State J. Rudolph Grimes had drafted a good document to replace the founding 1847 constitution, which had been set aside by the 1980 coup-makers. This was the work of the National Constitution Commission (NCC). The Sawyer draft was given to a panel of politicians, the Constitution Advisory Assembly (CAA) headed by Edward Binyah Kesselly. The politicians altered the document to satisfy the political ambitions of Head of State Samuel Doe, his erstwhile military colleagues, and no doubt some of the politicians themselves.

On August 27, 2012, I received a letter from President Sirleaf that began: "I am pleased that you have consented to serve as a member of the Constitution Review Committee (CRC)." Sirleaf even referenced the "Terms of Reference ... to which some of you have contributed" to guide the work. The letter came as a surprise, since I had received no prior request nor had I ever been consulted about the project. Perhaps the unexpected nature of this communication should have served as a warning that things would not go as anticipated. The letter indicated that the Governance Commission, headed by Amos Sawyer and the Law Reform Commission (LRC), headed by Jallah Barbu, was to serve as "technical arms" of a committee of politicians, of which I was supposed to be a part. While things initially looked orderly on paper, it was following our first series of meetings as a committee that dysfunction became evident.

As constituted, members of the committee were Counselor Gloria Musu Scott (a former chief justice of the Supreme Court, former senator, and vice chair person of the ruling Unity Party), Rev. Kennedy G. Sandy (presidential candidate of the small Liberia Transformation Party in the 2011 elections), Madame Amelia Ward (a veteran government minister and a vice presidential candidate of the Liberty Party in the 2005 elections), Soko V. Sackor (former deputy minister of Internal Affairs in the Sirleaf administration), and Rev. Jasper Ndaborlor (President of the Pentecostal Fellowship Union of Liberia and reportedly appointed to ensure representation of the Church on the committee). Though never formally adopted we drafted the following mission statement:

The CRC is a product of the 'Strategic Roadmap for National Healing, Peace Building, and Reconciliation,' charged with the duty to organize and facilitate a robust review process of the 1986 Constitution in a manner that ensures broad participation from all sectors of society, and acknowledges the role of the legislature, while being attentive to international norms

to which Liberia is party. In promoting national ownership and cohesion the process aims to achieve a revised Organic Law more attuned to the interests and aspirations of the Liberian people.

I personally thought Sawyer would seek to have replaced those provisions of his 1983 National Constitution Commission (NCC) draft that were excised by the Constitution Advisory Assembly (CAA), or the items taken out by Kesselly in 1984. I also thought that Barbu would bring the full force of LRC's technical expertise to the work of the committee, since all six of us on the committee were largely political appointees. Scott, a former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court during the Taylor presidency, was the only lawyer on the committee. We would seek to acquire the people's thinking through public consultations but then adjust the people's concerns to the requirements of a modern constitution. That is what was attempted at one point. But politics quickly overtook the process. Sawyer became a bystander, coming in when urged and with damaging legalism such as "We will be offering our independent advice to the President against recommendations of the CRC which in our best judgment run contrary to our [GC] mandate." Barbu and Scott were at loggerheads, often trading barbs and otherwise working at cross-purposes. Scott and Sackor also clashed often on procedural matters. Frequently absent from committee meetings, Kennedy did not present himself as a serious member. He ended up resigning to run for president in the 2017 elections. Scott kept her intentions close to the chest, displaying a high degree of political insularity. She encouraged the involvement of neither external expertise nor the Liberian intelligentsia.

Barbu seemed to have had mental reservations about the entire exercise, probably thinking that the CRC's work might have best been done by his commission or at least with LRC in the lead. I never understood the politics. At any rate, his LRC had already researched constitution reform, employing his colleagues and friends at Indiana University Law School, and he continued to work in parallel with CRC, never surrendering all to the CRC.

I spent a good deal of my time and energy trying to reconcile the warring political factions on the committee. I tried to engage the legal advisor to the President to little avail. Assurances from the President herself that she desired the constitution changed so that we "get rid of the imperial presidency once and for all" hardly echoed in our work. My substantive inputs were made in a series of memos to the committee. On my suggestion, we divided the work into subcommittees, and I became the chair of the subcommittee on drafting and documentation. At one instance of cooperation, Barbu headed a team of respected lawyers who drafted, under my titular chairmanship, ten amendment proposals with rationale to support each. The subjects of the proposed

amendments were drawn from public consultations and expert examination of shortcomings in the 1986 constitution.

In 2015, Barbu and I sat in hotel rooms in Indiana and drafted a comprehensive report for the CRC's consideration prior to a Gbarnga validation conference. Participants at the conference were drawn from civil society organizations from all the 15 counties and electoral districts of the country. These were some of the same people engaged in the public consultations. Liberians in the Diaspora also had opportunities to share their views during the exercise. The mandate of the Gbarnga conference was to examine and discuss the CRC's concluding documents relative to how the 1986 constitution might be altered in a way that was deemed more compatible with the interest of the Liberian people. Upon my return to Liberia, I found a substandard paper prepared by a CRC secretariat member claiming to be a draft comprehensive report.

But reports were not the heart of the matter. What mattered, as the process moved toward conclusion, were the recommendations, with rationale that would emanate from the CRC. Our dysfunction was revealed when we came up with two competing sets of recommendations. One was the ten-recommendations referenced earlier, and the second was a simple list of 25 recommendations that purportedly came from "the people" during the public consultations. And so, we headed to the Gbarnga validation conference in March 2015 with the two sets of recommendations: ten reasoned recommendations, extracted partially from the public consultations, that were to be rigorously vetted in Gbarnga and eventually subjected to the scrutiny of the assembly of representatives from electoral districts.

As we prepared for the Gbarnga meeting, however, and perhaps at the behest of one of our committee colleagues, a convoy of vehicles suddenly drove one afternoon into the compound of our offices and parked. Out came a number of individuals who approached the building and walked upstairs. When some of us in utter surprise came to know their identity, we discovered they were Christian evangelicals on a mission to influence the work of the CRC. They claimed that they had sought an appointment to express their views on the review process but that the CRC had not responded but was now poised for Gbarnga to consummate its work. What they desired was that our final recommendations should take Liberia back to God, back to the founding provisions of a Christian (as opposed to a secular) state. A brief discussion ensued, during which they found it necessary to express a religious edict that fire and brimstone would be rained upon us if we failed to do as they were claiming. The discussion was chaotically inconclusive.

Once in Gbarnga, the idea that guided action was that the assembled delegates represented "the people" and were thus clothed with authority to validate

the work of the CRC. Once completed and presented to the President, she would then engage with the legislature and urge the triggering mechanism for constitutional amendment. The rationale was that once the people had spoken, the legislators would be hard-pressed not to take seriously the CRC product backed by presidential interest. Scott and Ndaborlor seemed politically invested in the 25 propositions, which included declaring Liberia “a Christian state.” They thus ensured that the propositions were printed in large quantities and taken to Gbarnga. There were a much smaller number of the printed ten proposed amendments.

Once in Gbarnga, “the people” determined a preference for the 25 propositions over the 10 proposed amendments. In a charged and contentious political atmosphere, which I witnessed, violence was threatened if the plan to have the 10 vetted recommendations was carried forward. There was insistence that the people wanted the 25. An emotive issue on the list of 25 was number 24, which sought to declare Liberia a “Christian state” because, according to the latest national census, 85% of Liberians claimed to be Christians. Muslim Liberians objected strenuously, insisting that Liberia remain a “secular state” with the current arrangement of separation of church and state or mosque and state. But number 24 was put to a vote and it passed. As Muslims walked out of the hall, evangelical Christians burst into a rally singing Christian songs and declaring “victory in Christ.” This was the saga of the 25 vs. the 10.

In the end, Scott submitted the list of 25 recommendations to the President as voted upon in Gbarnga. There was never a collective CRC submission. There was never a CRC vote on the matter. I had registered my objection to number 24. The submission did not therefore represent a CRC consensus. The political statement was that “the people” had put aside the 10, opted for the 25, and thus democracy had been served.

I came to learn that the President’s reaction was to indicate her personal views on what was submitted to her. She rejected the Christian state proposal and a few others before making a submission to the legislature. The legislature had not acted when her presidential term ended in January 2018. After a process that lasted from 2013 through 2017 spent large amounts of donors’ funds particularly, we sadly ended with no constitutional reform. The CRC process did, however, generate considerable documentation, which could be assembled for the use of a future revisiting of our problematic constitution.

The CRC process was inconclusive for a variety of reasons: a dysfunctional committee, including the GC and LRC ex-officio members, ambiguous relationship of the committee with the legislature, the body that initiates constitutional amendments outside of submission by 10,000 citizens, and the issue of intellectual integrity versus excessive politicking. While the expressed



concerns of citizens were legitimate, the mechanism of consultation was not sufficiently broad and did not reach some critical groups of citizens.

## 6 National Symbols Review

My idea about a national symbols review stems from the need to Africanize a Liberia that remains steeped in its nineteenth-century symbolism. Where there is local originality and relevancy to the flags of our 15 counties, the American-like national flag does not help the cause of national unity. The motto on the seal, including perhaps some of the objects, can benefit from responsible review. The lyrics of the Anthem could also be reviewed in a beneficial manner. As to the national awards, a national discussion could lead to some alterations and/or the addition of new awards. It is my view as well that the indigenous Liberian gown that was conferred upon me in 2012 could be nationalized, improved upon, and made a genuine, perhaps the major national award.

The origin of my engagement with the national symbols review was my July 26, 2012 Oration and President Sirleaf's public reaction. I spoke of the need to examine our national symbols and awards with a view to amendments or changes in these words: "Then there is the issue of our national symbols and awards. We seem to talk about this issue interminably without the national will to act." President Sirleaf responded immediately stating publicly: "Let me express appreciation to Dr. Elwood Dunn for his candid retrospective of where we have come from as a people, where we are today, and where we are headed tomorrow. You no doubt noticed that Dr. Dunn was gowned, departing from the previous way of doing things, when he should have been decorated as the National Orator. He pointed out – as was pointed out by Dr. Edward Binyah Kesselly, and by me, several years ago – about the anachronistic symbols that we continue to have. And so, today, we call on Dr. Dunn to head a committee, a small committee that will invite proposals for changes in our national order." Then, looking in my direction, she added: "Dr. Dunn, please accept that responsibility." I stood and gave a bow of acceptance.

A part of my problem with national symbols was national awards. While the symbols were the Flag, Seal, and Anthem, the awards or "decorations" were insignias that the state conferred on those it honored for a variety of reasons. Like the symbols, I had, through study and insight, developed the view that these things needed to be revisited as a means of addressing national identity issues. I decided to call national attention to the need for reform in this domain by opting not to accept the award traditionally conferred on the national orator. Instead, the National Council of Traditional Chiefs and Elders honored me



by conferring (gowning) on me a Liberian indigenous gown, making me an honorary Paramount Chief.

I do not recall that the President's office took any initiative to contact me formally, nor do I recall that I made attempts to contact them. What I do recall is that an issue arose about my authority to undertake the responsibility the President had assigned. When in 2008 I was asked to lead the investigation into the email saga, we were faced with a similar authority issue until Executive Order No. 15 provided clarity. With the symbols project we eventually found clarity under the statutory authority of the Governance Commission (GC). But the GC did not evince much interest in the project.

We had hardly sufficiently organized the project when echoes of opposition to the idea of changing the national symbols began to be heard. The broad masses of the people seemed unaware about national symbols and their meaning. They seemed to view the symbols as objects of political power with no need to delve into meaning. I observed in the early days of the 1980 coup the incongruity of a Samuel Doe with "the love of liberty brought us here" emblazoned on his military cap. We sought to address the issue in a first information booklet, which we released. In it we set forth for the Liberian people what national symbols are and what the National Symbols Review Project (NSRP) was. We asserted that The National Flag, The National Seal, The National Anthem, and the various National Awards constitute the core of our national symbols. They are expressions or representations, or the "brand names" of a people, the Liberian people. We made clear that the NSRP was a government initiative derived from expressions by vocal and thoughtful segments of the population that a renewed national consensus about these symbols could help us address current burning issues of national unity and reconciliation. One purpose of symbols review we added was

to advance a national conversation on the subject of Liberia's national identity, and to affirm the belief that what unites us is far greater than what divides us. A sense of national identity is necessary to enable individual Liberians to transcend self or ethnic group absorption and commit to the common good. Without it Liberia can neither reconcile nor can it genuinely pursue the lofty goals of Vision 2030 as expressed in the slogan, "One people, one nation united for sustainable peace and development."

Between the periods January to October 2014, when we attempted in earnest to get the project off the ground, we were able to execute the following

programs and activities. Aided by four program officers (Emmanuel Bowier/Civic Education, Weade Kobbah Wureh/National Consultation, Welequoi Varlai/Artistic Design, Legislative Liaison/Public Support, and Patrick Flomo/Diaspora Liaison), the Project implementation team consisted of the chair of GC, the NSRP Coordinator (Dunn), and the Project Director for Administration (T. Sampson Quioh). Following the launch of the project and the establishment of an operational structure, the Project Implementation Team began to identify various program components for project implementation as follows:

- A. Public Awareness and Community Outreach (Project launched and National Symposium held).
- B. Post Symposium Activities (Plans for civic education and development of a citizen's education curriculum. All were interrupted by the Ebola crisis).

The project faced challenges. It was launched at a time when Liberians were struggling to come to terms with their identity, engendering competing views about the project. Some claimed there was no identity issue that would warrant the use of scarce public resources in the midst of economic difficulties. Others believed that while our symbols are problematic, addressing them could be deferred as more pressing tangible issues were on the agenda. Still others believed that unless we dealt with these intangibles, we risked remaining an un-reconciled people with all the adverse social implications. The Ebola crisis then posed a major challenge, though we looked forward to a post-Ebola time when we might resume the project.

Until such time we decided to prepare a status report on the project, which we submitted to the President October 26, 2014. In her reply of November 4, 2014, she wrote, *inter alia*,

I want you to know that I am fully committed to the NSRP for I believe it to be an indispensable ingredient in the process of promoting national unity. I take note of the decision to modify the implementation plan toward a robust civic education campaign and hope that this will result in an acceleration of the process toward completion of the project by the end of the current fiscal year.

And she added:

As the Budget Process is nearing closure, it is important that the Governance Commission submits to the Minister of Finance and Development Planning a proposed budget for the NSRP.

She copied the minister of finance and the chair of GC.

There was no movement on the budget issue. I continued my work with the CRC, with little indication of interest in the NSRP on the part of GC. As there was yet no public awareness to speak of, and now little indication of government's continuous interest, the project stalled. Whenever I saw the President in public or on other matters, she would inform me that her office was working on a new national award to compliment the already existing three national awards. In time I came to see a draft of the new award to be called "The Order of the Republic." Even this eleventh hour initiative did not materialize before the President left office in January 2018.

As the symbols review project was interrupted by the outbreak of the Ebola pandemic in 2014, I sought to relate personally to the national disaster. I had actually been residing in Monrovia when the first wave of the Ebola pandemic struck and the activities of the NSRP had to be suspended. The project went into interim report mode as I travelled to my Tennessee base. From that base, I followed closely the unfolding horror of the catastrophe. I then did two things. I wrote and had published in the Liberian dailies an article entitled "Ebola, A Threat to International Peace and Security." In it, I argued that the pandemic posed an existential threat to Liberia and West Africa with implications for international peace and security. As such, I urged the world community to accelerate its engagement from a "public health emergency of international concern" to a United Nations Chapter 7 mandate to "deliver as one." My second action was to call our Nobel Laureate Leymah Gbowee, who graciously took my call, as I pleaded with her to please find such African leaders of conscience as former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, Bishop Desmond Tutu, Madame Graca Machel, former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, and others, with a view to implementing some of what I had written. Our phone conversation ended on a re-assuring note.

## 7 Liberia National History Project

Though I was a part of the Vision 2030 exercise and appreciate the early references to the need for an inclusive and comprehensive history of Liberia, I have no recollection of any action being taken before my July 26, 2012 National Oration. In that speech I suggested that "we should encourage Liberian historians to hash out a national narrative that is truthful, inclusive, and does not shift blame from individual wrongdoing to groups, whether in the distant past or more recently." As I was unaware of any concrete action being taken, I had a

series of conversations with my colleague, Dr. William E. Allen, associate professor of history and departmental chair at the University of Liberia.

Those conversations resulted in a proposal we drafted for a joint approach to UNESCO/Liberia for funding. With ourselves as coordinators, we called our proposal the Liberia History Project (LIHPO). There was nothing necessarily extraordinary about this initiative. Academics the world over collaborate and produce scholarship. We were endeavoring to do just that. Our idea was simple and straightforward. There was no comprehensive Liberian history textbook. We observed that what passed for a Liberian school history textbook prior to 1980 was divisive as it celebrated the culture of one group, the repatriates, while disparaging that of the majority of Liberians. We recognized, however, that things were changing. The content contemplated was an integrative and inclusive history of the Liberian people in both their diversity and their commonality, and written largely by Liberian scholars of diverse backgrounds and experiences. It would begin with pre-Liberian realities and strive comprehensively to cover all aspects of the life of the Liberian people. By the 1970s, scholarly research had generated an important body of historical knowledge, which was amplified in the post-1980 period by even more remarkable data on various spheres of Liberian socio-cultural and political life. This meant that there was abundant multidisciplinary research that shed significant light on Liberia's past. And so we sought an opportunity to coordinate the writing of a comprehensive history of Liberia that could serve as a college textbook as well as reference material for high school and primary school students.

In our quest, we met jointly with the Liberian head of the UNESCO office in Monrovia, and his response was quite encouraging. Before we could go forward, however, the Governance Commission developed an interest in the Liberian history writing idea and convened a meeting of a number of interested parties, including Allen and me. At one point during one of the gatherings, GC Chairman Amos Sawyer bluntly asserted that so important a project as writing a history of the Liberian people could not be left in the hands of private individuals. Although it might have been justified, Allen and I did not respond defensively. Instead, and given that we had always envisaged the idea as a collaborative one, we voluntarily folded our idea into what GC was now endeavoring to undertake.

Thus, a Liberia National History Project under the banner of Vision 2030 was convened May 13–16, 2013, at the University of Liberia, and we agreed on a rudimentary structure. As chair of the project's advisory committee, Sawyer called a meeting on August 20, 2013, at the offices of GC, which brought together the advisory committee, the Liberia history editorial board, the University of Liberia, and UNESCO/Liberia. His letter citing me to the meeting reads in part:

You will recall that the organizing conference ended on May 16, 2013 and the draft report has since been circulated. According to the recommendations emanating from the conference, the role of the Advisory Committee is to provide the environment for the expert panel (under the leadership of the Editorial Board) to write an independent, scholarly, inclusive history and a corresponding curriculum for Liberian schools: grades one through twelve over a five-year period; to provide logistics, human and financial resources and the assurance that these resources are managed by the Editorial Board situated at the University of Liberia. As chair and co-chair of the Liberian History Project Advisory Committee, the Governance Commission and the Ministry of Education are to ensure that the Government of Liberia remains committed to this process and to prevail on our development partners to commit to the successful implementation of the project.

Here is what followed: The now structured project was in the hands of three government statutory bodies: Governance Commission, Ministry of Education, and Ministry of Finance and Development Planning. Since late 2013, the chair of the project's editorial board has disseminated an abstract entitled "General Introduction to the four-volumes of 'A Comprehensive History of Liberia,'" and there has been some preliminary communication with Liberian academics and others interested in the project. Additionally, UNESCO/Liberia has demonstrated its commitment by delivering computer equipment and other office supplies, as well as a full set of the UNESCO General History of Africa series written by African scholars, to the project. Allen and I had premised our original attempt on this African model or template.

Between 2013 and the end of the Sirleaf presidency in January 2018, many events and projects overshadowed the history project. Promised funding and demonstration of political will on the part of the government was not forthcoming. The history project languished as a consequence and remained in abeyance as Sirleaf left office.

## 8 Governance Reform and Vision 2030

The idea of governance reform had been on the minds of some ever since the coup in 1980. It was part of the push that led to the creation of the National Constitution Commission in 1981. Headed by Amos Sawyer, the NCC was charged with the responsibility of drafting a new constitution to replace the 1847 founding constitution that had been cast aside by the PRC. The idea of

reform hovered over the 2003 Accra Peace Conference that brought an end to the Liberian civil war and established an interim transitional government. With the goal of addressing some of the underlying problems that led to the tragic 14-year long conflict, the 2003 Accra Peace Agreement mandated a Governance Reform Commission. After he had been installed as Chairman of the Liberian Transitional Government in October 2003, Gyude Bryant appointed Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to head the Commission that would plan for and implement the mandate. Eventually, the idea of reform took the form of a long-term perspective study of Liberia and the formulation of a national vision.

For years, the idea of governance reform had also been part of my episodic engagement with Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and other Diaspora personalities and groups. In the 1980s, when Sirleaf was at the World Bank, post-Amin Uganda was part of her portfolio of responsibilities. I recall that she once quipped that what she gleaned from that experience would come in handy when the time came to face the challenges of a post-Doe Liberia. When I was in Liberia in 2004 and 2005, I occasionally visited Sirleaf at her offices located at the Ministry of Information, Cultural Affairs, and Tourism (MICAT). At those times, I received some briefing of what she was trying to do and she shared with me some preparatory documents. But it was not long before I developed the distinct impression that she, like others who were politically ambitious, kept her eyes more on the pending 2005 presidential and legislative elections than on governance reform just then. Once, while I was in her office, Dr. Toga McIntosh, a top operative in Ellen's Unity Party, attempted to recruit me to run for the Senate from my home county of Grand Bassa under the UP ticket. For my part, I continued with my archives rescuing project as those interested in political offices pursued their interests. For her part, governance reform would become a part of Sirleaf's bid for the presidency.

Because the 2003 Accra Peace Agreement called for presidential elections in 2005, there was not enough time to complete the actual work of the reform that should have been the underpinning of a healthy political system. From the start, there were those of us on the margins of the post-Accra arrangements who felt that the Liberian electorate needed more than two years before it would be in a frame of mind to vote wisely. There was still a significant UN presence in the country, and the difficult tasks of disarming and re-integration of ex-combatants, settlement of refugees and internally displaced persons, and other humanitarian emergencies were underway and absorbing the energies of internal stakeholders and external partners. But we were also aware of the reality of an international community that wanted to get on with the Liberian situation, stabilize things, and move on to the next conflict country. Although it was clear that elections would go forward in 2005, some of us felt

we should attempt to take proactive steps to lay a more solid foundation for national elections. For this reason, Byron Tarr and I took the lead in contacting a number of distinguished Liberians with a view to urging both Liberian stakeholders and international partners to consider seriously the idea of holding a National Conference before the October 2005 elections. We began our plea: “The Liberian nation today in crisis faces a challenge of change and renewal. At the heart of the crisis and challenge lie crucial issues of sustainable peace based in equity and justice.” We called for a national forum to be convened in Monrovia before the elections in order to affirm national community and begin the difficult process of developing a “leadership consensus” about a national path forward. We also wanted to provide an opportunity for Liberians to forge a national reform agenda that addressed issues of institutional reform, leadership ethos, and a problematic national mindset predisposed to autocracy. We hoped a national conference would provide a forum for Liberians to speak within an organized setting to their future leaders, and to have an opportunity to express their hopes and fears and their unwavering commitment to accountable governance and the rule of law. Ideally, the conference would expand what is called the Liberian “stakeholders” so that the donor community would come to appreciate the Liberia beneath the veneer of shifting “governing authorities.”

Byron working from Liberia and I from my Sewanee base succeeded in convincing more than two dozen Liberians that the idea had merit. Among them were former Interim President Amos Sawyer, Roman Catholic Monsignor Robert G. Tikpor, Journalist Tom Kamara, Shiekh Kafumba Konneh, Professor Sakui Malakpa, former Vice President Bennie Warner, Dr. John T. Wulu, and Dr. Jestina Doe-Anderson. We wrote letters to key Liberian stakeholders beginning with Chairman Bryant, and to international partners, including the Special Representative of the Secretary General. We were roundly ignored, and the elections went forward without the benefit of a preparatory conference.

In November of 2005, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf won the election, defeating former soccer star George Weah. The following month, I was in Liberia to collect archival material. I looked forward to witnessing history in the making: the inauguration of the first democratically elected female president of Liberia, Mrs. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. Excitement was in the air as everyone looked forward to the mid-January 2006 installation. As Sirleaf was organizing her government, there was much speculation in the local dailies and the Liberian online news organs that my name was on a shortlist for the Foreign Affairs portfolio. I had heard nothing from the President-elect herself or her office. Knowing that once she was installed in office it would be difficult to see her before returning to the US, without fanfare I made an appointment to see our



President-elect. Some thought I knew something and was being tight-lipped. In fact, what I had to say to her beyond extending congratulations and best wishes was this: that once she had completed the task of organizing her government, she should know of my long-standing interest in governance reform and national reconciliation issues. She had just ended her time as chairperson of the Governance Reform Commission under the interim government of Gyude Bryant, and I had interacted with her during the two-year period that she served. And, of course, our time together in the Diaspora had witnessed many discussions of the reform subject. I suggested that consultancy was the way I could serve if needed. I could not have promised more because I was still on the faculty at Sewanee and had a return ticket paid for by the rescuing archives project. The visit with the President-elect was brief. I did not tarry, as I knew that she was organizing herself for the onerous responsibilities of the Liberian presidency so soon after a terrible civil war. As I left with her a one-page memorandum (dated 1/5/06) to refresh her memory about our brief meeting, I took leave, wished her well, and we agreed to stay in touch. The speculation about my role in the Sirleaf government stopped. On January 16, 2006, I witnessed the spectacular inauguration and then I was on the plane back to my own Sewanee responsibilities.

After taking office, President Sirleaf appointed Amos Sawyer to lead the reform effort. Previously, in November of 2005, following Sirleaf's election, I had encountered Sawyer at the annual African Studies Association meeting held in Washington, D.C. During our time together, Sawyer expressed his interest in the Governance Reform Commission. There is little doubt that he had already talked with Madame Sirleaf about this, as he was a part of her electoral campaign. In fact, he shared with me some of the strategies they employed to defeat the CDC Candidate George Weah during the second round of the election. Once Sirleaf took office, Sawyer became chairman of the Governance Reform Commission that was soon changed to Governance Commission (GC). I recall that he initially considered three persons to collaborate with him as he began organizing that office: Byron Tarr, Yarsuo Weh Dorliae, and me. Weh Dorliae was in Philadelphia, I was at my Sewanee base, and Tarr was in Liberia. There were some email exchanges and phone conversations involving all three of us with Sawyer. Tarr was not interested in a full-time job, preferring a consultancy. I made it clear that I would collaborate as fully as possible, but from my Sewanee base. Weh Dorliae went to Liberia and became a GC commissioner for the duration of Sirleaf's two presidential terms.

The Governance Commission had a number of critically important tasks, all essential to rebuilding a Liberia whose physical, social, and moral capital had been badly depleted by years of war and instability. Establishing good

governance was essential to restoring our nation. Specifically, the GC sought to focus on the following goals toward achieving that end: decentralizing an autocratic government that had concentrated power in Monrovia, reorganizing and rationalizing inefficient public sector operations, restoring integrity to government mired in corruption, increasing citizen involvement in government, and encouraging and empowering the community-based organizations political scientists call civil society.

My own work with the GC took many forms. Upon my retirement from Sewanee in 2012, I endeavored to return home both metaphorically and in actuality. My mind ran to Aime Cesaire's poem entitled, *Cahier d'un Retour au Pays Natal*, as I struggled with the form my own return would take. On one level, I had never left home. Though self-exiled since 1980, I visited Liberia in 1988, 1991, 1993, 2000, 2004, 2005, and with regularity between 2006 and 2019, settling for eight unbroken months at times. After 2003, much of my work in "returning home" was connected to the Governance Commission. When I was asked by President Sirleaf to review our national symbols, the work proceeded under the authority of the GC. Then, in short order, came my nomination as a member of the Constitution Review Committee (CRC). By virtue of my longstanding interest in the history of Liberia, I became one of the prime movers in the eventual establishment of a Liberian national history project, also an effort drawn under the GC umbrella. However, my most significant and longstanding involvement with the Governance Commission was my work on Vision 2030, a long-term perspective study of Liberia's present and future. For me, Vision 2030 was the endpoint of my decades-long engagement with many fellow Liberians interested in at least two things. The first and more immediate was how to heal the nation from the deep divisions brought about by the 1980 military coup, and the civil war that followed. The second thing, perhaps more elusive, was how to, or whether to, re-imagine Liberia given a pervasive "Black colonialism" perception proffered by foreign academics and seemingly embraced by many Liberians. Though these themes have been treated in my writings and speeches, I will elaborate briefly on them in my final reflections. For now, I will proceed with sequencing events in my own experience that brought us all eventually to producing a Vision 2030 document.

Not surprisingly, Sirleaf made governance reform a part of her campaign as she sought the presidency. Upon winning, she was now at the helm of an idea that was long in gestation. What would she now do with it in terms of her available political capital? The responsibility soon fell to the statutory bodies of the Governance Commission and the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs. In November 2006, a UNDP project document signed by the planning minister set forth the following:

Develop a national vision statement and a strategic framework and agenda for operationalizing the vision. The outcome will be to provide a sense of direction and national ownership and confidence in the future. The strategy will be two-fold: 1.) Action-oriented research to cover a deeper analysis of the past, present and a possible future for Liberia, and 2.) A consultative process to target Liberian citizens and their external partners.

Though I was involved in some of the planning exercises, what seemed more pressing to the regime were various poverty-reduction strategy papers. I had the distinct impression that Sirleaf wanted to lay out her governance agenda and begin its implementation, while deferring a “visioning” process perceived by some in government as a somewhat esoteric academic exercise. In other words, visioning seemed like a national conference in disguise, and based on what we now know, Sirleaf wanted to establish solid achievements in her first six-year term in order to make her candidacy for re-election a “formidable” one indeed.

So, not much happened before 2010, when a new Vision 2030 project document was advanced. This version acknowledged the critical need to integrate development policies in a holistic development framework that would be inscribed in a long-term perspective study in which “reconciliation and development, peace and democracy would share the same space and mutually reinforce.” Alioune Sall, a recognized Senegalese expert in prospective foresight in Africa and director of the South Africa-based Africa Futures Institute, was hired by the government to lead the project. We were now getting down to work with established organs such as a National Core Team and a National Steering Committee. In the quite elaborate arrangements, I came to serve primarily as research coordinator for what was dubbed “cross-cutting issues.” These were educational and curricular issues to be researched by Sister Mary Laurene Browne, social cleavages issues to be researched by Dr. Alfred Kulah, constitutional and legal issues to be researched by Counselors L. Koboi Johnson and Jallah Barbu, inequality in Liberia issues to be assigned to Dr. John Gay, and national symbols issues to be researched by African American Professor John Simpkins. I also participated in the discussions of the Core Team.

Unfortunately, the program went forward in fits and starts. Overt visioning activities were suspended during the 2011 elections campaign, as each presidential candidate challenging the incumbent said that ours was a partisan Sirleaf visioning exercise. Furthermore, they each had their own reform agendas. I was always concerned that this kind of partisanship would emerge if we did not succeed in making our effort genuinely national. And we scarcely did.

Over time, the vision came to be expressed as an aspiration of “One people, one nation, united for sustainable peace and development.” This goal had been formulated by drawing on the contents of ten research papers produced by the working group and research team. A retrospective analysis of the research product led to the elaboration of four scenarios or glimpses of Liberia’s future. These were expressed as follows:

- Scenario 1: “Thank God Oh.” Some economic and infrastructural change, not significant enough to effect transformation.
- Scenario 2: Developmental State: Foundation for economic transformation is laid but achieving this is difficult.
- Scenario 3: Political Liberalization and Resource Based Economy: Significant improvement in systems of governance without structural economic transformation.
- Scenario 4: “Everything ‘chakla oh’” [messed up in Liberian parlance]: Authoritarian form of government in place.

Vision 2030 recommended Scenario 2 as the only viable path to a bright future. Scenario 1 was rejected as too weak, merely treading water, and not equal to the deep challenges facing Liberia. Scenario 3 was set aside because focusing only on governance was not enough. If Liberia had any chance of reaching the goal of becoming a democratic and stable middle-income country by 2030, the nation needed a comprehensive strategy. Issues such as economic inequality, the fact that Liberia was overly reliant on foreign aid and the export of raw materials, and the lack of employment and educational opportunity could not be ignored. Finally, Scenario 4 was obviously unacceptable, but nevertheless not unimaginable. In the end, Scenario 2, which offered a comprehensive approach to both governance and economics, was embraced by the Vision 2030 participants. In recommending Scenario 2, we suggested that the choice be subjected to an operationalization process guided by the following questions. What should be done? How should it be done? Who should do what, and with what resources?

The main purpose of the vision exercise was to provide a compass that would guide national development in the face of enormous post-war challenges. Following the Gbarnga validation conference of 2012, at least three problems became evident. The first had to do with the quality and scope of Liberian individuals and groups involved in the Vision 2030 process. The talent search for participants was not broad enough, with the result that some of Liberia’s brightest and best were not invited. This problem was compounded when a number of key Liberian experts declined to participate in Vision 2030,

thinking the project was partisan. Clearly, the range of people drawn into the public consultations was too narrow. Consequently, the contending perspectives of Liberia's past were not fully aired.

The second problem had to do with communication strategy. Unfortunately, word about the project was not spread broadly and widely enough. I recall participant Togba Nah Tipoteh reporting to me about a vigorous argument with President Sirleaf, in which he made this point. Tipoteh's encounter took place toward the end of the project, at a time when the President was apparently not prepared for any further political investment in the work.

The third problem concerned the responsible statutory bodies, the Governance Commission and the Finance Ministry, which invested in the project only in a limited way. The final outcome proves the point. These bodies wanted the vision to validate the government's development plan dubbed the "Agenda for Transformation." The statutory bodies cast aside a draft concept paper outlining the operationalization process of the vision. Instead, they offered a much more limited Agenda for Transformation and a Roadmap for Reconciliation. Though each of the latter represented important initiatives for national transformation, they fell short of harnessing the critical social capital that pursuing the Vision to its logical conclusion would have provided. Only grudgingly accepting the visioning process, the statutory bodies halted their efforts when we reached the critical stage of operationalizing the vision or putting in place an implementation mechanism. The statutory bodies in effect walked away from the project. Alioune Sall got the message, and so he too walked away, leaving Liberia unceremoniously.

The Vision 2030 effort was plagued by some internal problems as well. Byron Tarr once insisted on compensation before performing tasks, indicating that his time for "missionary work" was over. To which Deputy Finance Minister James F. Kollie attempted to call his bluff by withholding payment to Tarr until a task was performed. Some of us tried to mediate, at which time I heard Kollie say, probably in exasperation, something to the effect "that's why I tell colleagues of my generation that we withdraw and wait until they all die before engaging to fix our country." We pleaded with Kollie, who then gave in; Byron was paid and the work went forward, but the tension implicit in this episode probably still lingers.

There was no effective follow-up at many levels following the Gbarnga validation conference. A proposed Vision secretariat was never established. It took several years before there was an agreed upon structured engagement with civil society organizations. Consequently, serious public engagement with implementation could not be pursued, and thus resulted in a missed

opportunity to make this a Liberian national project that would be irreversible by a succeeding national regime.

Without measures to remediate these problems, including disseminating the Vision throughout the country and the Diaspora such that Liberians would be able to take ownership of it and carry out their responsibilities in terms of implementation, the Vision risked going the way of other such initiatives in our recent past. A key requirement for a successful operationalization process is that it should lead Liberians to think, speak, and act differently as regards transforming their country. This did not happen. The Sirleaf regime's accomplishments would likely have been more enduring were these critical non-tangible measures implemented before she left office. The very nature of these exercises required a personal imprimatur, for successor governments would hardly find for themselves the political capital to stay the course. They would have to be extraordinary.

## The Center for Policy Studies

There was another important undertaking that I was a part of that lost its luster in 2017. This was a private project that was initiated almost five years earlier by my friend Byron Tarr who died in 2017. It was the Center for Policy Studies (CERPS/Liberia), an independent research institution created to investigate, through rigorous research, public policy issues critical to the development of Liberia and important to West Africa. In undertaking research using the best social science methodology, CERPS aimed to identify a range of alternative possible choices, and initiate public debate involving policy makers, donors, and the public with a view to having a consensus on optimum choices. This think tank sought to fill a vacuum in the generation of ideas from non-government sources in furtherance of national development.

Among CERPS' modest accomplishments since its inception in 2013 are an inaugural study on the policy landscape of Liberia, two papers commissioned by the US Institute of Peace, a Governance Commission project to edit a Vision 2030 document, a private foundation commission to analyze corruption issues, and a think piece for UNDP/Liberia on the imperatives of post-Ebola reform initiatives. Though CERPS has not folded, Byron's death has placed a damper on the initiative.



## Reflections on the Consultancy

In the aftermath of the violent and dramatic coup d'état of April 1980, I had become a part of the defunct Tolbert regime, or more broadly, the hegemonic TWP regime. I had no illusions about what had happened to Liberia and what the requirements for renewal would be going forward. At age 38, and a pragmatic but passionate Liberian, I sought a niche on the margins where I could contribute to the uplifting of Liberia. I recalled a time, perhaps in 1976 when the late Foreign Minister Cecil Dennis and I, as his special assistant, returned from a government mission abroad and went to report to President Tolbert. As we left the President's office, the minister shook hands with the President with the words "thank you, Mr. President, for yet another opportunity to be of service to you." When it was my turn to say goodbye to the President, my words were "thank you, Mr. President, for the opportunity to serve Liberia."

So, whether in or out of government, my passion for Liberia has never waned or wavered. After more than 30 years of teaching, researching, and writing, I came early to consider the notion of a national reconciliation problematic for Liberia. For me, Liberia stood in need of reconciliation in the aftermath of the civil disturbance of April 14, 1979. This need was amplified following the coup of April 1980, the foiled coup of 1985, and then the biggest of them all, the civil war that consumed the nation for 14 long years. With the need for national reconciliation now so publicly established, I sought opportunities to contribute what I could. I found opportunities as my involvement was invited in the following projects or processes: the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a long-term perspective study of Liberia dubbed "Vision 2030," investigating government corruption allegations, serving as national orator for Liberia's 165<sup>th</sup> independence anniversary, serving as a member of a Constitution Review Committee, coordinating a national symbols review project, and association with a project to facilitate the writing of a comprehensive history of Liberia.

Each of the efforts is described in the foregoing pages. The issue now is with what results or outcomes? The 1979 crisis produced a Brownell Commission to pursue reconciliation and other critical issues, but this effort, like the broader national conversation that characterized the 1970s, was circumvented by the 1980 coup. I was invited by the TRC to make remarks at its "Thematic Hearings on Historical Review." I expressed the hope that all conscientious Liberians would in time come to understand that the profound meaning of April 14, 1979, in the annals of Liberian history, is that the process and event of that

date represented perhaps the first confrontation between an alienated people and their government, the felt perpetrators of the alienation. This is what the essentially preliminary Brownell Commission report sought to convey. Unfortunately, I said further, the fact that 29 years later (2008), we are still dealing with the same issue, suggests that we have exacerbated alienation.

We undertook the vision project in fits and starts, including having to suspend activities during the campaign for the 2011 elections. When activities were resumed, and ostensibly taken to term, we were unable to shake off the public impression that this was a regime vision rather than a national one. While some worked to make it a national vision, the statutory bodies of the Governance Commission and the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning placed the government's development plan, the Agenda for Transformation, ahead of the vision. As a result, the vision has had little echo since Sirleaf left office.

While the various initiatives have registered some progress – important documentation generated from the CRC process, and some important background research in case of most of the other initiatives – the sum total of the effort has not had the intended transformative effect or even setting in motion the intended reformation intent. One is left with the impression that the politics of reform superseded the reform of politics. All processes set in motion thus remain in abeyance because none was brought to term, and there is little evidence that successor President George Weah has taken up any of the reconciliation issues.

Yet President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf deemed it pertinent to actually paraphrase me or, more accurately, draw from Vision 2030 statements that I may have drafted, concluding in the following words her January 28, 2013 (incidentally my birthday, and in my absence) annual message to the legislature:

Let me close by quoting from our renowned professor and historian, Dr. Elwood Dunn, transformation through the prism of Vision 2030 requires thinking differently, speaking differently and acting differently. It means a paradigm shift, a new narrative about development and synergistic relationship. The responsibility to achieve this transformation is ours. If not us, who? If not now, when?

## Final Reflections/Epilogue

Like many Liberians, place and family shaped me initially. The wider world of experience came later. The place was Lower Buchanan, Grand Bassa County, the second largest village-city in Liberia, after the capital city of Monrovia. Buchanan became the hub of LAMCO, a multinational iron ore mining company as I was leaving high school, which may have altered its character. When I was growing up, however, Lower Buchanan was a small sleepy town of an ethnically mixed population living in harmony with nature. It was for me a safe and secure place as I enjoyed there a wonderful childhood under the nurturing care primarily of my maternal grandparents.

With informal and formal education completed, my work experience in Liberia took off at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where I served variously as assistant minister, special assistant to Foreign Minister C. Cecil Dennis, Jr., and director of the Foreign Service Institute. Dennis became thus my first immediate supervisor in government. I worked closely and came to know well the human person and the public official, Cecil Dennis. He was an astute lawyer gifted with a keen intellect and a discerning mind. He was also a person who loved life and sought to live it fully. He worked hard and he played hard. Any negative vibrations that may have been emitted by his person concealed an honest man who did his best to live by the golden rule. A Georgetown Law School graduate, he was quick to distinguish himself among his African and international peers, once appointed foreign minister in 1973. I joined his ministry a year later, and we worked together for three years. It was a time of great international exposure for me as we attended meetings of the OAU, the UN, the Nonaligned Countries Movement, as well as carrying out special missions to President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia and President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania. His focus was on serving President Tolbert and the highflying life of a rising African diplomat. Influential African presidents lobbied President Tolbert to allow Dennis' candidacy for Secretary General of the OAU. Cultivating a team at the ministry was not his forte. This led to some disaffections and was not negligible a factor in my leaving the ministry in 1977.

My two supervisors during my time at the Executive Mansion and Ministry of State for Presidential Affairs were President Tolbert and Minister of State E. Reginald Townsend.

My second immediate supervisor in government, Townsend was a seasoned politician and a gifted editor with a master's degree in Journalism from

American University. A man small in stature but a giant of an intellect, he clearly had all of the five proverbial talents. A journalist by profession, he had such a command of the written word that some of us were in awe of his ability to organize words on paper. I learned much from his editing of letters, speeches and reports. In service to the Tolbert administration, we labored together to provide a measure of leadership to the office of the President. We both had the unique opportunity of drafting each other's appointment letters. He drafted for the President's signature the letter appointing me to succeed him as minister of state, and I drafted for the President's signature his appointment letter as national chairman of the TWP. His command of the English language was legendary. Having served in former President Tubman's administration, he was a cautious man who ran a loose shop. He did not function like a chief of office staff, but rather as the eminent minister in a sea of many others, including deputies and assistants. If he had a focus, it was more on the levels of the ruling Party, the Masonic Craft, the Presbyterian Church, of which he became a lay Moderator, and other such perceived pillars of the old Liberia or the ancien regime. When passed over for the position of vice president of Liberia after having been given assurance by the President, he was demoralized. He seemed also unhappy with the quickening pace of change occasioned by the government's engagement with a vocal opposition. Like Justice Minister Joseph J. F. Chesson, he wanted concessions made to the opposition rolled back and the status quo ante restored. His immediate quest was to be out of Tolbert's Executive Mansion and into some autonomous agency.

As Townsend had already succeeded James N. Anderson as acting national chairman of the TWP, the congress of the party in Buchanan provided an opportunity to transition to a full-time chairman for him. There is little doubt that the movers and shakers of the party began making their moves shortly after the Standard Bearer created a party reform task force. The reform intent was undercut as the major recommendations were ignored, while cosmetic changes were trumpeted. It is not outside the realm of the possible that Townsend was in conversation with administration hardliners such as Chesson, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Chief Justice, and possibly others to stage a palace coup had President Tolbert left as scheduled to attend the independence celebrations of Zimbabwe in mid April 1980. Circumstantial evidence to this effect comes from 1979 reports from the American embassy in Monrovia to the State Department in Washington. There were also persistent rumors just before the April 1980 coup of a right-wing coup to have been led by AFL Major William Jerbo, an American-trained guerilla officer. Jerbo was hunted down and killed in Cape Mount County by Corporal Zayzay Ballah several weeks

into the 1980 coup, and his body was displayed at the BTC military barrack in Monrovia.

As for the President himself, I read about the man Tolbert as being a change agent, while still on the faculty at Seton Hall University in the early 1970s. This was shortly after he succeeded to the presidency upon the death of President William V.S. Tubman in July 1971. I had actually feared the autocratic Tubman and may have delayed my return home had he still been in office. President Tubman knew my father well and considered him a supporter of C.L. Simpson for the presidency in 1943, and a sympathizer of the Independent True Whig Party of former President Edwin Barclay. Barclay had decades earlier appointed my father superintendent of Grand Bassa County. In fact, a relative had reminded me about these facts while I was in graduate school.

At any rate, the debut of the Tolbert presidency was for me a breath of fresh air for Liberia. I felt optimistic returning home when I did. That a number of opposition forces were arrayed against Tolbert on my arrival home did not dampen my enthusiasm. I saw that fact as a healthy development. Liberia, I thought, was on the path toward more meaningful democratic governance. I had no illusions that the change process would be easy, given the reality of an entrenched political hegemony. I hoped and prayed that the interplay of social forces would gradually result in a more equitable and just society. This was, at the least, my frame of mind as I entered government first at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It remained by mindset as I transitioned to the Executive Mansion.

I found in Tolbert a congenial and versatile individual with a gifted mind. He was also an introvert, enjoying long walks in the woods in Bentol, rather than elaborate state parties as was the preference of his predecessor. A 1934 graduate of Liberia College (before it became the University of Liberia in 1952), which then offered a classical education, he was the class valedictorian with “summa cum laude” distinction. He was married to Victoria Anna David of Grand Cape Mount County. Mrs. Tolbert tells the story in her autobiography of how she came to meet her husband after his elder brother refused to consider her because her mother was a Vai-Liberian. Having served his entire career in government before becoming president, I sensed in him a politician on a mission. He genuinely wanted a changed Liberia and seemed prepared to employ the power of his office to achieve this.

President Tolbert was influenced by his time as Tubman's vice president, obliquely referencing in my presence muted policy differences with Tubman. The specific reference was to a mission Tolbert made to Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser and how Tubman dismissed views he had expressed then on the Middle East situation. Tolbert wanted a Liberian brand of affirmative

action to accelerate the pace of change in Liberia. He had faith in the youth. He looked with weary eyes on his peer colleagues in government: Speaker Richard Henries, Chief Justice James A.A. Pierre, and perhaps his own senator-brother Frank Tolbert, among others. He was also human and had his moments of doubt as to whether he would succeed in his endeavors. He sensed what was happening around him and hoped all players would act in what he often called “the supreme interest of the nation.” He was respectful of opposition figures and considered most of their activities legitimate even if there were questions of legality. Remember, archaic laws were still on the books. He held conversations often with all of them, though often in the presence of senior politicians. He would say of Byron Tarr that one had to have a strong stomach to take the doses of advice on the political economy that Byron offered. When I included a line in a draft speech, “as a democrat,” and Foreign Minister Dennis suggested a rewording that obscured the word “democrat,” President Tolbert overruled him, declaring that he considered himself a leader respectful of democratic principles.

He saw what he was attempting to do as a national leader, perhaps as a calling not divorced from his calling as a Baptist preacher. He may have experienced a thing or two as vice president, so that once in the presidential seat it did not become a matter of merely establishing a difference with Tubman, but a strong desire to change Liberia in a progressive direction. He was a reformer who saw reform as a process, though he clearly wanted it speeded up with the end in view of his presidential term in January 1984. Admirers called him “Speedy.” There were strategic and tactical errors, but the thrust of reform – domestically toward more inclusive governance and internationally toward deeper African and “third world” solidarity – was never in doubt. At least, not in my mind.

I hold the view that a significant shift in governance in Liberia began with the 1968 trial for treason of Ambassador Henry Boima Fahnbulleh, Sr. The francophone weekly *Jeune Afrique* aptly characterized the trial as Liberia itself being on trial (“Le Liberia fait son procès”). The year 1968 was also the year that witnessed the political persecution and prosecution of three of the four first superintendents of the newly created interior counties: Robert Quellie Kennedy of Lofa, James Y. Gbarbea of Bong, and Gabriel Farnigalo of Nimba. Tolbert had quietly courted these men while still vice president. Upon his accession to the presidency, he openly embraced all of them, and others perhaps not publicly known. But perhaps overshadowing this embrace was the symbolism of his release from life imprisonment of Ambassador Fahnbulleh and posting him in the President’s office as an assistant minister of state. That there were errors made going forward cannot be denied. Few felt the crosscurrents of

political pressures Tolbert endured – from his old guard colleagues, from some of his family members, as well as from the social movements and other disaffected societal forces. He was never deterred from his reformist goal. In the last crackdown of the government on the opposition one month to the April 1980 coup, Tolbert was insisting on a fair trial for those accused of treason. He paid the ultimate price for daring to be a different TWP president, indeed a different Liberian president. A reformer in the TWP tradition, the fact that the Buchanan party congress reforms were not implemented speaks in part to the rearguard actions of the old guard. Both the left or opposition forces and the right were incensed by Tolbert's actions or inaction, each wanting him to totally abandon the other. Each plotted to overthrow him. A proxy of the left opportunistically moved faster. The April 1980 coup resulted. Amidst it all, Tolbert the reformer may yet in time be vindicated. History could here be instructive. Reformist President E.J. Roye was assassinated and his TWP regime deposed in 1872. Following an interregnum of two presidencies, the TWP returned to power in 1878. But that return was not sustained until during the election of 1883 when both the Republican Party and the TWP nominated H.R.W. Johnson for president. Upon winning the presidency, Johnson opted for TWP identity, thus ushering in what became a hegemonic regime that lasted until the 1980 coup, with the assassination of Tolbert and the overthrow of his TWP regime. The TWP itself may be a spent force, but some of the ideals that animated it could be resurrected and coalesced with contemporary political tendencies. At its formation in the nineteenth century, the party championed the interests of upriver farmers many of whom were recently arrived immigrants. It displayed a vision of inclusive governance to consist of an interior policy and attention to farmers (as opposed to a then reigning merchant class) and recaptive matters. Some saw the assemblage of reformists advocating a government of national unity in Jackson Doe's Liberia Action Party (LAP) during the 1985 elections as representing such a political comeback. LAP and Gabriel Kpolleh's Liberia Unification Party (LUP) were subsequently folded into Edward Kesselly's Unity Party under whose banner Ellen Johnson Sirleaf served two terms as President of Liberia.

Protocol aside, President Tolbert seemed suspicious of some of his interlocutors who were American diplomats or officials. As he said in one interview, the US attitude toward Liberia was seemingly resulting in a vacuum, and that nature abhors a vacuum. Two things were happening simultaneously: domestic change that was trending toward deeper Pan-African solidarity and the rise of China with its overture to Africa. In the face of these developments, he sought to deepen Liberian Pan-African solidarity, while seeking new friends in China and the socialist world. Tolbert inherited from Tubman a relationship



with Tiawan, but was moving steadily toward the People's Republic of China. He wanted an end to American officials taking Liberia for granted, while believing that he could secure some development assistance from the other Cold War bloc. When ties with Tiawan were severed and diplomatic relations established with China on February 17, 1977, the Chinese actually obliged and quite a bit was in the pipeline when the coup occurred. I was slated, while still at Foreign Affairs, to join Vice President James Greene in attending the funeral of Tiawanese President Chiang Kai-Shek in April 1975. For reasons perhaps having to do with sentiments shifting towards Beijing, the trip was cancelled. I would play an important preparatory role for the President's visit to China in 1978, communicating and meeting frequently with Chinese Ambassador Wang Rensan whom I had come to know when still at the Foreign Ministry.

Though I joined the Executive Mansion staff as Director of the Cabinet and necessarily communicated regularly with all members of the President's Cabinet, with a few exceptions, my relationship was distant with these officials. I was commissioned the same day in November 1979 as Information Minister Johnny McClain and his deputies, Peter Naigow, Bai T. Moore, and Momo Rogers. One of my deputies at the Ministry of State, David Chieh was also commissioned on the same occasion. I knew Johnny and Peter better than I did Chieh, though I had met Chieh when I came to the Mansion in 1977. Perhaps it was because of his longevity at the Mansion that we did not gravitate toward each other. As Chieh makes clear in his memoir, he was a leftover from the Tubman era, was vying for a seat in the legislature, and had little real interest in the Mansion bureaucracy. Johnny was a boyhood friend from Grand Bassa County. We had both studied in francophone countries and otherwise had things to talk about in common. I had come to know Naigow through my friend Byron Tarr. George Boley was a part of this loose friendship network. While I knew Byron the best, all of us (Naigow, Boley, and Tarr) shared in common, I believe, an interest in a reformist agenda for Liberia. So that when Byron was dismissed by the President a year or so earlier, I had the dismissal letter hand-delivered to Johnny and Peter with the understanding that they at MICAT would manage the news release.

For the duration of my brief tenure as minister of state, I developed no special ties with any of my Cabinet colleagues, though, as already mentioned, Johnny and I were on the same wavelength. There were others who exuded varying degrees of a reformist outlook. Those that come to mind included Foreign Minister Dennis, Finance Minister Sirleaf, Defense Minister James Gbarbea, Local Government Minister Edward Kesselly, Postal Affairs Minister Trohoe Kparghai, Agriculture Minister Florence Chenoweth, and her successor Agriculture Minister Cyril Bright, Health Minister Kate Bryant, Labor Minister

Estrada Bernard, Land and Mines Minister Cletus Wortorson, Commerce Minister John Sherman, and Action for Development and Progress Minister Luseni Dunzo. My choice of these ministers is based on my observations, and interactions in some cases, since I joined the Mansion staff in 1977.

Though I have offered earlier, in context, my impressions of Sirleaf, I am returning to her in these final reflections. Ever since I met Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in the 1970s, I found her to be particularly interesting. She was quiet, observant, and seemingly calculating. I guess this attitude was a function of her earlier public service engagements. She once acknowledged respect for the professional prowess of earlier occupants of the finance ministry portfolio – Charles Dunbar Sherman, James Milton Weeks, and Stephen Allen Tolbert – even as she looked askance on the social structure, within which each of these gentlemen functioned.

I probably first met Sirleaf as a fellow deputy minister, she at finance and I at the Executive Mansion. We were members together of the Brownell Commission. After a brief interval, we became members of President Tolbert's Cabinet, she as finance minister, and I as minister of state for presidential affairs. Judging from her role on the Brownell Commission and her reaction to the Grimes Commission that drafted a Code of Conduct for public officials, her progressive, perhaps even radical thinking was clearly in evidence.

Following the coup d'état, and upon my return home, I also again interacted with Sirleaf briefly, before we each found our separate ways to self-exile in the US. In concert with many others, we did some good work together as Liberia descended into war in 1990, and also in the war's immediate aftermath. Our relationship was cordial, never close. It was limited to talking issues meant to keep Liberia on the map. This contrasted sharply in comparison to my relationship with Byron Tarr.

When Sirleaf won the presidency, her first request of me was to lead a team to investigate charges of improprieties on part of officials in her government. She told me up front that someone had recommended me to her. I did not ask who it was, neither did she volunteer. I performed the task, as was my inclination, in the interest of the country. I was subsequently asked to deliver the national oration of July 26, 2012. Following the address, I was asked to serve on a constitution review team and a national symbols review committee. So that between 2008 to the end of the Sirleaf presidency, it was my privilege and honor to work with President Sirleaf on her agenda to reform or transform our country. The successes, in my view, were not large, but important initiatives were set in motion and left to hopefully be built upon by future leaderships. She did some important brick-and-mortar work of restoration following the devastations of instability and war. The symbolism of her person added

significant intangible dimensions. Pathways were opened for women and girls in Liberia and beyond, and the democracy space has been enlarged. But the push for transformation was not sustained, and the work of national reconciliation remains in abeyance. As to why this is the case, some have pointed to charges of complicity with warlords during the country's civil war years. In fact, the TRC report, as we have seen, indicted our sitting president in 2009, recommending that she and others be banned from seeking public office for a 30-year period. Though an opinion of the nation's Supreme Court left that indictment inoperable, public sentiment is divided on the matter.

I recall three circumstances when we collaborated. She wanted a couple of letters delivered directly to the President, without passing through the Mansion mail distribution process and she had them hand-delivered to me. When I called to acquire her views on the Grimes Commission that recommended a code of conduct for public officials, she told me she approved the recommendations in their entirety, suggesting that she may have preferred something even more radical. I asked her to deliver a message to my wife Matilda, who was in London enroute to Libya to an international women's conference, as Sirleaf was herself leaving for London. Before she could deliver the message, I had called someone on the same matter. Sirleaf's words to me upon her return home were: "Oh Ye of little faith!"

My relationship with those of the President's family that I encountered during my tenure was cordial, except for Senator Frank Tolbert, the President's elder brother. The senator was often butting heads with his brother, and he once accosted me at the Mansion to say that I should be ashamed of myself for signing the Brownell Commission Report, for which I served as secretary. I never got to know Finance Minister Steve Tolbert, though I met him on a couple of occasions. Presidential daughter Christine Tolbert Norman was a freshman student at Cuttington in my senior year there. We had virtually no interaction in our official capacities, she being a deputy minister of education.

I have no recollection of a relationship with anyone in particular at the US Embassy during my tenure as minister. Ambassador Robert Smith was in the US attending to his health, while Deputy Chief of Mission Julius Walker ran the embassy. American diplomats, as I subsequently came to learn when conducting research in the US national archives, were busy at this time reporting to Washington on the travails of the Tolbert Administration and seemingly engaged in a countdown to the end of the Tolbert government, if not the President himself. They predicted he would not last to the end of his term in 1984. They made unfavorable comparisons with President Tubman. They welcomed opposition figures at the embassy with regularity. When Matthews, at his request, visited on Nov. 27, 1979, he told the diplomats that there were those

who would like to seize opportunities such as an April 14th redux to stage what the embassy termed a “right wing coup” against Tolbert, and then turn their attention to eradicating the progressive forces. Perhaps Matthews was reflecting some of the *modus operandi* of J.J. Chesson’s Justice Ministry. Chief Justice Pierre asked to see the American diplomats apparently to vent his own anger at President Tolbert, and they used that occasion to report to Washington that Tolbert had become the emperor with no clothes. Pierre, they reported, retained a strong belief that the situation that obtained in the country was due to communist influence. Pierre reportedly added that Liberia had never had a president as great as Tubman and “probably would not in the next 100 years.” They wrote that Speaker Henries worried about the President’s “manifest indecision” and that Henries was “carefully weighing the alternatives.” Walker reported on Tolbert’s amnesty speech reacting to the Brownell Commission Report: “His defensive and injured tone came through loud and clear during the speech.” The American diplomats talked freely among themselves about Liberia’s problems being solved “through extralegal, even violent means.”

During what turned out to be President Tolbert’s last visit to Washington in October 1979, he tried to impress upon President Jimmy Carter Liberia’s pressing socio-economic needs and the need for heightened US engagement. This was certainly not the frame of mind of the embassy in Monrovia. President Carter’s public diplomatic response was to offer to send a group of distinguished Americans, including businessmen and educators, to “explore ways of encouraging a greater US involvement in Liberia’s development.” This was largely to be an exploratory mission.

Once home, Tolbert constituted a Liberia preparatory committee for a January 1980 visit of the 15-person US Presidential Commission chaired by Congressman William Gray III. A 12-person Liberian team included Senator S. Edward Peal, a former Liberian Ambassador to the US, Dr. Mary Antoinette Brown Sherman, President of the University of Liberia, Finance Minister Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Dr. Christian Baker, businessman and former president of Cuttington University College, Defense Minister James Gbarbea, and Minister of State for Presidential Affairs D. Elwood Dunn. Our engagement in the negotiation of schedules with American officials continued through April 1980, when the Tolbert regime was overthrown.

It seemed a strange paradox that I would opt to exile myself to the US, given the American circumstances of Liberia’s founding, my lived Liberian experience, and the tension in the relationship between the US and Liberia in the months and weeks leading to the April 1980 coup. Sewanee, Tennessee, deep in the American south, became a place of refuge for my young family and me, as we fled political upheaval in our homeland. I found Sewanee through the

Episcopal Church network. Sewanee thought of me as a fit in their quest to establish an enduring Black presence on an otherwise lily-white campus.

I met two Black students and no Black faculty as I arrived in August 1981. My entry coincided with the hiring of African American Eric Benjamin as director of minority students' affairs. Perhaps both Benjamin and I were visual assets, if not more, to those at the university who were determined this time around to establish a permanent Black presence at academic Sewanee. I say "academic Sewanee," because Sewanee has always had a Black community, but it was a community of largely servants to academic Sewanee. This is not a book on the totality of my Sewanee experience. The book only highlights my time with academic Sewanee.

Those who welcomed us, befriended us, and gave us a sense of security were not many, but they were critical to our decision to remain in Sewanee as the years went by. They include the top administrators, Vice Chancellor and President Robert M. Ayres, Provost Arthur Shaefer, Dean of the College W. Brown Patterson, and my original colleagues in the political science department: Chairman Gilbert Gilchrist, Bob Keele, Barclay Ward, Charlie Brockett, John McCarthy, and Joan Ward. There were those in other departments who reached out, Harold Goldberg (and his wife Nancy) and Anita Goodstein of the history department, Marvin Goodstein of the economics department, and George Poe (and his wife Sylvia) of the French department. In the Sewanee community, Arthur Ben and Elizabeth Nick Chitty embraced us. Arthur Ben had done some work for Cuttington College and knew well Missionary Bishop B.W. Harris. In fact, he was in the vehicle with the bishop and Mrs. Harris, when the bishop suffered a heart attack while driving from New York to Washington, and did not survive. Arthur Ben had also visited Liberia multiple times. These two gentle souls were like Sewanee institutions and they became our reference point for almost everything in Sewanee. Dr. Roger and Trink Beasley established themselves in Sewanee a few years following our entry, and they too became our good friends. Dr. Beasley had served in the 1950s as a missionary doctor to the work of the Order of the Holy Cross in Bolahun, Lofa County, Liberia.

We worked with students of color as their numbers gradually increased, as well as with progressive white students and others who genuinely saw my presence as critical to the liberal arts education enterprise. They enrolled in my courses over the decades and sought my counsel for things academic and things personal.

Matilda's interests broadened our engagement in the State of Tennessee. She sought out for us leaders and others in Sewanee's Black community, many of whom became our close friends. Her teaching at St. Andrews-Sewanee high

school exposed us to yet another Sewanee, as we came to know students and faculty at that institution. The fact that our children attended schools from the nursery level through high school and in one case, college at Sewanee, presented yet another feature of our time at Sewanee.

These constituted only a part of our Sewanee experience. This little rural Southern town of under two thousand souls became indeed our refuge. There, we raised our four children, one being born there, and from there we sent all four to college. Matilda found her calling there, becoming a priest in the Episcopal Church, having obtained both the M. Div. and the D.Min. degrees from Sewanee's School of Theology. Once ordained, and with opportunities in the Diocese of East Tennessee, we moved residency from Sewanee to Chattanooga, with me making the daily commute of 50 miles each way for many years. As a family, we came to experience the Diocese of East Tennessee, and that was a whole other world, under which we labored for many years.

We met a number of important Sewanee visitors, among them South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey, Professor Ali Mazrui, Opera Singer Jessye Norman, Nobel Laureate Helen Grace Akwii-Wangusa of Kenya, Harvard Theologian Peter John Gomes, Georgia Congressman John Robert Lewis, Politician Julian Bond, and Historian John Hope Franklin.

My triple Sewanee obligations of teaching, researching, and community service enabled me to enhance my study of Liberia and render service to the Liberian Diaspora community in the US, especially during moments of crisis and war. When the war finally ended, I was opportunized, through consultancy work, to contribute to the challenging and continuing process of national restorations in Liberia.

I collaborated broadly and widely over the many years, attending academic conferences particularly of the African Studies Association and the Liberian Studies Association, and occasionally the American Political Science Association and the International Studies Association. And though I met and worked with a large number of colleagues in the US, Europe, Africa, and the Middle East, I offer here my candid views on three who were at the heart of my Liberia research experience: Svend Holsoe of the University of Delaware, J. Gus Liebenow of Indiana University, and Warren d'Azevedo of the University of Nevada, Reno.

Holsoe was a good friend in research collaboration. He devoted his life to the study of Liberia in a way that no Liberian had done in recent memory. While Liberians trained as anthropologists, sociologists, historians, and in other disciplines, they all seemed to have followed pursuits other than deepening their scholarship. The cases that come to mind include John Payne Mitchell,



Augustus Feweh Caine, and Hannah Abeodu Bowen Jones. Mitchell earned a PhD in international relations from the University of Chicago in 1955, returned home, and became a career government bureaucrat. Caine who received his PhD in sociology from Michigan State University in the early 1960s, returned home and became a bureaucrat and politician. So did Jones who received a PhD in history from Northwestern University in 1960. Though she has a brief record of teaching (she was my history teacher at the University of Liberia) and research, the bulk of her career was as a government minister and Liberian ambassador. This left the field opened to non-Liberians. In this way, Holsoe became a leading interpreter of Liberia's indigenous communities, even though his research focus was the Vai people.

I hold the view that the task of deepening our understanding, in contexts, of Liberia's indigenous communities will remain incomplete until Liberians revisit some of the interesting studies and monographs that have been produced over the years by American and European scholars of Liberia. Following the 1980 coup in Liberia and the civil war that followed, a good number of Liberian scholars found themselves in exile in the US. Holsoe joined a few American scholars of Liberia in the view that the Liberian Studies Association (LSA) should devolve upon this growing number of Liberian scholars in the Diaspora. In this way I was recruited in 1985 to serve as the first Liberian editor of the *Liberian Studies Journal*. Holsoe was, however, chagrined at the criticisms leveled at him and others particularly at the 1986 LSA conference in Washington, D.C. He called me following the gathering and wondered whether he was being excommunicated from the association. Though he was among the American pioneers of studying Liberia's indigenous communities, he privately made derogatory comments about some elements of indigenous life. Svend also struggled to explain how he gained access in the 1960s to the unorganized national archives in Monrovia and what it was that he might have unauthorizedly taken away.

Liebenow took great pride as author of "the evolution of [Black immigrant] privilege" thesis or proposition, which came to guide America's Liberia policy. But his thesis also held out the pernicious prospect of purporting to define a feature of the Liberian identity. This was made possible because of the propensity of a Liberian intelligentsia that hardly spoke to such critical issues. So, both at home and abroad, most lettered Liberians adopted "evolution of privilege" without critical analysis until perhaps Carl Patrick Burrowes' critique appeared in a Temple University occasional paper in 1989. Perhaps no American ambassador was posted to Liberia from the late 1960s through the decade of the 1970s without a State Department-sponsored briefing from Liebenow. The economics companion book from scholars at Northwestern University, "Growth



Without Development,” presented the Liebenow thesis in economic terms. Among those who have offered serious critiques of Liebenow’s work are Elliott Berg of the World Bank, Clarence Zamba Liberty, Boniface I. Obichere, and more recently, Carl Patrick Burrowes.

Warren L. d’Azevedo was a rare and compassionate Western scholar. Perhaps it was his prior work among Native Americans that prepared him for the nuanced Liberian experience he acquired in the course of his decades of research in Western Liberia. D’Azevedo was anthropologist, sociologist, and cultural historian combined. A major theorist in the study of African art, he seemingly extrapolated from there an intellectual framework, which he brought to the study of Liberia. He postulated the study of indigenous peoples amidst the complexities of interactions with other peoples, some of a vastly different culture and consequently worldview. He was a pioneer scholar of the Gola people, and as he studied them amid multiple circumstances, he was able to use his research findings to enhance our understanding of the Liberian state.

As I have pointed out, to the outside world, Liberia is often portrayed in binary terms: Black immigrants from the New World and peoples indigenous to the Liberia area, though many migrated there during an earlier era. There is little accounting for the fact that these two original peoples have lived together and interacted since the early colonial settlement in the 1820s. Given Liberia’s education problematic, many Liberians were fed the binary staple. My own lived experience was more nuanced. In the home where I was born and raised, there were also “wards” or children from rural communities. I witnessed no untoward treatment, as all of us children were raised in a Christian setting. Might mitigating circumstances have influenced our experiences? My maternal grandparents who raised me had mothers who were ethnic Bassa, and both grandparents were themselves “wards” in the home of a Creole family in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

It was not until I arrived in the US for graduate school and began familiarizing myself in a serious way with the existing literature on Liberia that two things happened: The literature suggested a “Black colonialism” thesis that I had not been familiar with, and I then began comparing the Liberian experience that I had lived with the experiences of other Africans that I had encountered in elementary, high school, and college at home, in France, and now in the US. I came to see more clearly the denigration of things indigenous African and the placing of things Western on a pedestal. A cultural hierarchy followed that placed the Westerner at the apex, followed by the Westernized African, with the non-Westernized African at the bottom. I was seeing two sides of myself perhaps for the first time, and I began then an intellectual struggle to reconcile

these two selves. This was important because it was a defining moment for me. It was not an easy experience of self-examination and self-revelation.

All of this transpired in the context of the continuing struggle for African liberation from the vestiges of European colonialism. It was also in the context of a Washington, D.C. of the late 1960s with the civil rights struggle and the anti-war protests. I was beginning to ponder issues of equity and justice in common with my peers and associates, but also how those issues related to Liberia that had so recently become a focus of my study.

This was the beginning of my long journey to imagine a hybrid Liberia, combining elements from both African and Western cultures. My introduction to the works of the pioneer Pan-Africanist Edward Wilmot Blyden helped crystallize my thinking tremendously. I hold the view that after almost 200 years of living together, even if inequitably, we the peoples of Liberia have come to share a good deal of what our original ancestors were. There has been socio-cultural interpenetration, but because we have all been victims of the slave trade and slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism, we have allowed our differences to overshadow our commonalities.

The 1970s was a decade of social ferment when Liberians struggled with the imperative of change. The discourse then associated the term progressive with the social movements of the day and the individuals associated with them. To be sure, PAL, MOJA, and other such movements were progressive in the sense of desiring to transform Liberia or move the country away from its ancien regime toward inclusive governance and genuine democracy. The term “progressive” may, however, also be applicable to others in Liberian society, some a part of the government who were reformers or agents of change. These latter were not content with the status quo but were also aware of the complexity of Liberian society, not to speak of the complexity of human nature. They desired evolutionary, rather than revolutionary change. They took Tolbert at his word and looked forward to 1984, when Tolbert’s term would end and power would transfer to a coalition of forces on the order, as we have seen, of the Liberia Action Party (LAP) that was born after the 1980 coup. LAP was a coalition of moderately progressive Liberians that came on the political stage when the military government’s ban on politics was lifted in 1984. The politics of the era led to a coalition with other progressives, all supporting the candidacy of Jackson Fiah Doe in the elections of 1985. This coalition, incidentally, actually won that election but was not allowed by the ruling military regime to come to power. So, progressive in the evolutionary sense incorporates all change agents supportive of the same goals as the revolutionary progressives. I saw myself as a moderate progressive in a progressive Tolbert administration, a progressive as I consulted with Matthews in 1980 and as I remain progressive in my life of

research and writing. Progressives, in the sense of desiring to see Liberia go forward into a democratic future, may be a label more broadly applicable than partisan politicians would be comfortable admitting.

Juxtaposed to progressive political forces has been the old guard or those perhaps of an earlier generation who seemed satisfied with the status quo. They included such of President Tolbert's political associates as former Local Government Minister E. Jonathan Goodridge, former TWP Secretary General McKinley DeShield, former Senate President Protempore Frank E. Tolbert, former House Speaker Richard A. Henries, and former Chief Justice James A.A. Pierre.

An already hegemonic political regime had been entrenched during the 27-year rule of President Tubman. This regime was purportedly sustained through the myth of four societal pillars: church, state, party, and Masonic craft. These men and many others wanted to maintain the old system, opening it up only gradually and conditionally. A former TWP secretary general and vice president, C.L. Simpson, Sr. wrote in his memoir that two courses were initially opened to the immigrant founders of the Liberian state. "One was to merge at the outset the comparatively small, advanced element of the population into the mass of those who ... were at a more primitive stage of development ... The other was to preserve the ideal of western democracy on however small and imperfect a scale and direct our efforts at gradually improving the system and extending it to broader sections of the population ..." It was perhaps this early choice that laid the foundation for what evolved into a hegemonic regime. The old guard may not have all been uniformal in their thinking, some perhaps being more rigid than others, but they were not ready for the sort of change that Tolbert was spearheading. Into this old guard mindset came Tolbert, incidentally one of their own that they felt was now betraying them. Former Ambassador George A. Padmore wrote derisively of Tolbert, "Are you me, or am I you?" This was in reference to Tolbert's rhetoric of change, but also his symbolisms: the swear-in safari suit, the shift from formal Western attires to a Sékou Touré-like pure white attire. Touré himself wrote that once Tolbert made the shift in attire, he never turned back.

Tolbert added another symbol, as he served with Touré as pallbearer at the funeral in Conakry, Guinea, in 1972 of former Ghanaian President Kwame Nkrumah, a Tubman nemesis. A video recording captures the historic event at which Tolbert was one of the principal speakers. Eulogizing the Pan-Africanist Nkrumah, Tolbert declared, *inter alia*:

In fine, we have gathered here to set forth his brilliant life, to dispel darkness in the lives of all who are oppressed, suppressed and depressed by

racial discrimination, segregation and colonialism, and to mourn the loss of a fallen hero who was an indomitable and gallant fighter for the great cause of Africa.

Given my background and training, I have never been an outgoing person. I tend to be reserved, approaching things with a heavy dose of caution, often tiptoeing into situations. This attitude has led to my being more comfortable on the margins than at the center of most things. I am frankly uncomfortable when placed in the limelight. This personality trait, whether acquired or innate, has enabled me to navigate many situations in my life and work. I mediated during Sirleaf-era projects, within my own extended family, as there was talk in the wake of the 1980 coup about my paternal siblings' reference to "native women" children versus the others, or how the post-coup environment spurned cleavages among my maternal Kilby relatives, with some talking about being "white-washed Kilbys" or adopted Kilbys. Those identifying themselves on both sides of the social divide have often confided in me as indigenes badmouthed repatriates, and vice versa.

I entered France and later Sewanee with caution, confident about my identity, but accepting of my outsider status. There was plenty of subtle, but little of overt racial or cultural discrimination. I tended to gravitate to Diaspora communities: Africans and other non-French nationalities in France, and the same configuration in the US. My relationship with African Americans was cordial, seldom intimate. Those who stood with me at my wedding were Congolese, Malawian, Mozambican, and Liberian. At Seton Hall, I felt the racial tension as I transitioned from the Department of Asian and Non-Western Civilizations to the Black Studies Department. I was the only African in the new department and I was treated like an outsider.

Sewanee may carry the image of bastion of the old South, but change was in the air as I arrived there in 1981. I found the leading administrators and political science colleagues to be, almost all of them, change agents. I was welcomed and felt comfortable as long as I stayed within their circle. I had little interest outside their circle. The dynamics at Sewanee were different than Seton Hall. At Sewanee, there were two African American administrators and no faculty. One was at a middle level in the College and the other in the School of Theology. They both viewed me as an outsider. There were no issues with those majority white students who were my students, African American and international students. I observed a negative/positive divide in relations with the broader majority white students and the majority white faculty. This means some were supportive of my presence and others were not. I gravitated towards the positives in all instances and peacefully co-existed with the negatives. Always aware

of where I was, I felt secure in central campus (main locale of the University's daily activities) and among those most welcoming in their attitudes.

My scholarship engagements stemmed from a strong desire to better understand my country. Before I left home for study abroad, I had a limited appreciation about what Liberia was all about. Once abroad, first in France and then in the US, I began comparing and exploring. I began comparing the Liberian experience with others and exploring the Liberian mosaic. These simple insights were soon used to frame my research undertakings. Reference books such as historical dictionaries, compilations of presidential addresses, and bibliographies were produced against those backdrops. Themes touching relations between Liberia and the United States, Liberia's role in organizing African unity, or social history through Episcopal Church history, were also developed with comparing and exploring in mind.

My scholarship has also taken seriously the need to bring a critical Liberian perspective to Liberian studies in general. At times, it was not what I did, but what I uncovered as needing to be done: that Liberians arriving late to the enterprise of Liberian studies consider a critical review of monographs on the peoples of Liberia produced by foreign scholars. This touches the delicate issue of establishing a Liberian identity, a major concern of my scholarship as well.

What, one might ask, is my frame of mind on the Liberian situation two decades into the twenty-first century? What are my hopes for the future? Liberia has, in my lifetime, weathered two major crises that continue to cast a long shadow: the 1980 military coup and the 14-year civil war. Those were defining moments in the country's history, perhaps comparable to no other. The intangibles of the social fabric have been dealt a devastating blow, as have the tangibles of the national physical infrastructure. We cannot re-build the latter if the former is ignored or left to fray. I am deeply concerned about this social fabric, or those things that define us as a people, those things around which we could rally to do the heavy lifting required for both re-imagining ourselves, and then embracing a leadership ethos for sustainable peace and development.

My purpose in writing my life's story, as earlier indicated, is to personalize Liberian history as I lived it, hoping it might constitute one of the building blocks for a future history of the Liberian people. This is history as autobiography. I hope I made such strides toward the accomplishment of my purpose that readers would come to know me as they acquire a glimpse into the Liberia of my time.

I consider it important, finally, to leave a sense of my frame of mind on the Liberian situation as we enter the third decade of the twenty-first century. A young Liberian mentee so eloquently expresses to his generation my own

sentiments that, with his permission, I am moved to end this memoir with the words of Mahmud Johnson, an innovative Liberian business entrepreneur:

Every country starts as an idea, and relies on subsequent generations to fix the flaws and forge toward a more perfect nation. The notion of a perfect society is an abstraction that no nation has attained. Even the most 'advanced' nations are still grappling with foundational flaws, after all these years. [Reference the USA during the Donald Trump presidency]. And so, to say that Liberia is a country of zero, based on its foundational flaws, is to say that no country in the world has made any progress. We, of course, must address many issues within our social fabric. But we must start from a position of truth and understanding. To suggest that *everyone* who came before us was somehow incompetent and selfish is to give up any hope of moving our country forward, because it shows that we have not learned anything from our past, and we somehow think that we know it all. Liberia was founded at a time when even the idea of a black republic seemed like an oxymoron. Yet, almost two centuries later, we are still here! Our compatriots have made history and set major records in the arts, science, politics, sports, technology, business, etc. Our forefathers and mothers gave their blood, sweat and tears for this country. It is about time we took a moment to at least acknowledge the gains and strides made by people who came before us, learn what they did right, learn from their mistakes, and forge toward a stronger future. Otherwise, 50 years from now, kids will look back and your/my/our names will be totally wiped out from the history, our sacrifices insignificant, our lessons lost. And future generations will repeat the exact same mistakes we are making, and go through the exact same struggles, all because we refuse to understand our past and properly document our history!

We must forge a better future. But we must avoid the trap of arrogance to think that we are the only generation who loves or has ever loved this country. We must sit at the feet of our elders and learn from their successes and mistakes! We must be brutally honest about our history, of course. But we must talk about the negatives and the positives in equal measure.

## *APPENDICES*







## Chronology of Key Events

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1964	BA, Cuttington College & Divinity School.
1965	Clerk/Typist, Central Office, Department of State, Monrovia. Departure for study in France (October).
1967	Certificat d'Études Politiques, Université de Lyon, France.
1969	MA, International Relations, American University. Embarked on PhD studies, American University.
1970	Instructor of African Studies, Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ Inducted Phi Sigma Alpha, national political science honor society.
1971	Married in Washington, D.C., to Matilda Eeleen Greene of Sinoe County, Liberia. Birth of first son Daniel Elwood, Jr. (Sept. 19).
1972	PhD, International Studies, American University. Assistant professor African Studies, Seton Hall University.
1973	Adjunct Assistant professor African Studies, Fordham University, NY.
1974	Return to Liberia permanently following 9 years of study (and work) abroad. Appointed Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs for American Affairs & Director of Foreign Service Institute.
1975	South African Prime Minister John Vorster makes controversial visit to Liberia (Feb 11–12). Finance Minister Stephen Tolbert dies in plane crash off coast of Sinoe Appointed Special Assistant to the Foreign Minister. Foreign Minister makes controversial remarks at US Embassy in Monrovia (July 4). Member Liberian delegation UN Security Council on question of Namibia (July). Member Liberian delegation OAU Summit Kampala, Uganda (June). Member Liberian delegation Foreign Ministers of Nonaligned Countries Movement, Lima, Peru (August).

- Member Liberian delegation 7<sup>th</sup> special session UN General Assembly & regular session (August/Sept.).
- 1976 President Tolbert begins an eight-year presidential term.
- Member Liberian delegation OAU Summit on question of Angola, Addis Ababa (January).
- Birth of first daughter Chandra Rachel (Feb. 7).
- Member Liberian delegation Nonaligned Coordinating Bureau, Algeria (May/June).
- Member Liberian delegation OAU Summit, Mauritius (June/July).
- Member Liberian delegation Nonaligned Summit, Sri Lanka (August).
- 1977 Member Liberian delegation OAU Liberation Committee meeting Lusaka, Zambia (Jan./Feb).
- Member Liberian delegation Ministerial conference of Nonaligned Coordinating Bureau, New Delhi, India (April).
- Member Liberian delegation UN meeting of support for liberation of Zimbabwe & Namibia, Maputo, Mozambique (May).
- Member Liberian delegation OAU Summit, Libreville, Gabon (Aug.).
- Vice President James E. Greene dies.
- United Methodist Bishop Bennie D. Warner succeeds Greene.
- Appointed Deputy Minister of State for Presidential Affairs & Director of the Cabinet.
- Liberia establishes diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China (February).
- 1978 US President Carter visits Liberia (April 3).
- President Tolbert visits China.
- 1979 Published first book, *Foreign Policy of Liberia During the Tubman Era*.
- Treaty of mutual defense between Guinea and Liberia.
- Unprecedented civil disturbance of April 14, otherwise called "rice riots."
- President Tolbert grants general amnesty to Liberians charged with directing the events of April 14.
- Special Envoy of President Tolbert to President Touré of Guinea.
- Liberia hosts 16<sup>th</sup> OAU summit meeting.
- Delivered national oration July 26.
- President Tolbert visits US (Sept/Oct.).
- Appointed Minister of State for Presidential Affairs (Oct.).
- 1980 January 8, Registration of Progressive People's Party (PPP) as legal political party.

- March 3: PPP's "midnight march" on Executive Mansion.
- March 7: PPP calls for resignation of Tolbert government.
- March 10, Tolbert addresses legislature.
- March 28, Act of Legislature bans PPP.
- April 4, Dunn leaves for Zimbabwe as envoy of the President.
- April 12, Assassination of Tolbert and overthrow of his government in a military coup d'état.
- April 13, new revolutionary military government, the People's Redemption Council, is formed.
- April 22, 13 senior Tolbert government officials publically executed.
- April 22, Dunn returns to Monrovia
- Aug.-Dec., Associate Professor Political Science, Univ. of Liberia.
- Leaves for United States exile (December).
- 1981 Birth of second daughter Germaine Sunu (April 26). Appointed to faculty, Sewanee: The University of the South, Sewanee, Tennessee (August).
- 1985 Editor, *Liberian Studies Journal* (to 1995).  
Co-published *Historical Dictionary of Liberia* (1<sup>st</sup> edition).
- 1987 Birth of second son Sedar Thomas (Nov. 18).
- 1988 Co-published *Liberia: A National Polity in Transition*.
- 1990 TV Interview, McNeil/Lehrer News Hour (June 8).  
Interview, National Public Radio (June 10).  
Interview, Christian Science Monitor Radio.
- 1992 Published *History of the Episcopal Church in Liberia*.
- 1995 Testimony US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, subcommittee on African Affairs (Sept. 21).
- 1996 Testimony US House of Representatives Committee on International Relations, subcommittee on Africa (June 26).  
Anel member, Council on Foreign Relations (June 26).  
Interview, "Talk of the Nation." NPR.
- 2001 Co-published *Historical Dictionary of Liberia* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition).
- 2002 Short-term observer with the Carter Center for Sierra Leone elections.
- 2003 TV Interview, PBS News Hour (June).
- 2005 Short-term observer with the Carter Center for Ethiopia elections.
- 2009 Published *Liberia and the United States During the Cold War Limits of Reciprocity*.
- 2011 Published *Annual Messages of the Presidents of Liberia, 1848–2010*.

- 2012 Delivered National Oration (July 26).
- 2014 Distinguished Alumni Service Award, Cuttington University (June).
- 2017 Birth of first grandson Abram Elwood Dunn (Nov. 10).
- 2018 The D. Elwood Dunn Department of History & International Relations at Cuttington Univ. named & dedicated Feb. 22.  
Lifetime Service Award, Liberian Studies Association (April).  
Birth of second grandson Lucas Thomas Dunn (Nov. 29).
- 2020 Published *History of the Episcopal Church of Liberia Since 1980: A Sequel*.
- 2021 Death of my Spouse Matilda Eeleen Greene Dunn (January 4).
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## Defining the National Purpose of Liberia, a National Oration by D. Elwood Dunn on the 132nd Independence Anniversary of Liberia, July 26, 1979

### Prelude

We are living in an age between the ages in which children are coming to birth but there is not strength to bring forth. We can see clearly what ought to be done to bring order and peace into the lives of the nations; but we do not have the strength to do what we ought ... The lack of strength to bring forth is usually interpreted as the consequence of a natural or cultural "lag." This idea does not represent the whole truth about the defect of our will. It obscures the positive and spiritual element in our resistance to necessary change. The lower and narrower loyalties which stand against the newer and wider loyalties are armed not merely with the force of natural inertia but guile of spirit and the stubbornness of all forms of idolatry in human history.

*Faith for a hazardous Future*

Reinhold Niebuhr

Mr. President;

Mr. Vice President;

Mr. Speaker and Members of the Legislature;

Mr. Acting Chief Justice and Members of the Judiciary;

Mr. National Chairman and Officials of the True Whig Party; Members of the Cabinet;

Visiting Dignitaries;

Doyen and Members of the Diplomatic Corps;

Officials of Government;

Army Chief of Staff;

Prelates and Members of the Clergy;

My fellow Countrymen and Friends:

For me the honor is great and the sense of appreciation immense, but surpassing both is the intensity of the humility I feel in being called upon to deliver the oration on this auspicious occasion of the One Hundred and Thirty Second Anniversary of our National Independence.

When I recall the high caliber of the individuals who have before me mounted this podium to veritably face the nation, I am impelled to exclaim: Let the words of my mouth and the thoughts which I have humbly endeavored to crystallize, modestly contribute to uplifting the national spirit as the Republic of Liberia takes yet another giant step toward a nobler destiny.

Allow me, Mr. President, to express to you my deep and abiding gratitude for the continuing manifestation of trust and confidence in designating me to perform this unique national service at this juncture of our history. I do see this, sir, as a singular honor and recognition to the youth of this land whom you have unceasingly and meaningfully involved in the people's affairs since your incumbency as president.

On the occasion of this significant milestone in our national life, let us all with one accord, with reverence and supplication, give thanks to the God of our Fathers for bringing us safe thus far as a people, and let us implore his continuing graces so that we may fully comprehend what we must do to serve the present age, and be enlightened and fortified to face the hazardous future.

Mr. President, fellow countrymen, and friends: We now live in a world assailed by doubt as to our most cherished hopes and our most legitimate aspirations. Strife, the rattle of arms and a clash of material interests seem the order of the day, and amidst our predicament we assume attitudes of self-solicitude eschewing the salutary course of compromise and conciliation. The situation on our own continent seems far from encouraging as our regional Organization is "rocked by disputes of an amazing diversity."

Indeed, we meet at a time when serious thinking pervades the nation as it adjusts to the exigencies of contemporary circumstances. We meet at a time when every patriot must stand, as it were, at the watchtower to safeguard the essence of our nationhood. We meet at a time when Liberia, under the leadership of President Tolbert has once more demonstrated its staying power, the continuing strength of our traditional moral leadership in Africa, by successfully hosting the Sixteenth Ordinary Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity. We meet at a time when there is being forged, perhaps not necessarily a new, but a re-interpreted national purpose in harmony with the national will and in service to the national interest.

In full appreciation of the import of these developments for our country at the commencement of its one hundred and thirty-second year, I invite your attention very briefly to the topic: *Defining the National Purpose of Liberia*.

What is national purpose?

National purpose is the controlling value system, value consensus, value preferences, of any nation as it contemplates domestic/international interaction. It is a phenomenon, which emerges from the socio-political milieu in which the nation has its real being. It evolves along with the institutions, the agencies; and the moral and material stresses to which the nation-state inevitably is subjected. To the extent that this ego-image of any national group is clearly formulated and based on genuine value consensus, it becomes an absolutely controlling determinant of national interest, a veritable "Manifest Destiny."



Our national purpose evolves from the circumstances which attended the founding of Liberia. As we will all readily recall, the idea of Liberia developed from the need to locate a place of refuge for the freed people of color of North America in the early 1800's.

With the attention of post-slave-trade philanthropists focused on rehabilitation of those areas that had been devastated by the inhumanities of slavery and the slave trade, the idea of introducing to the West African coast Christian civilization soon became a controlling purpose. This was many years before European colonization of Africa would begin in earnest with its accompaniment of a similar "civilizing mission."

In the context of our own history, the purpose of the then formative body politic was introduced with the entity, that is, with the commonwealth and then the nation-state. One had to necessarily await a consolidation of the Liberian nation-state, an advancement of the process of its harmonization with its environment before a true national purpose could be determined.

Additional to the multifarious problems which our country faced during its first century of existence was an uneven and unending debate between advocates of the Euro-American perception of the "civilizing mission" and those who differed fundamentally. Among the advocates were Hilary Teague, our first secretary of state and the core leadership of the early Liberian Republican National Administration.

On the opposing side was an array of distinguished Liberian thinkers, among them the Rev. Alexander Crummell, a philosopher of African regeneration, and Dr. Edward Wilmot Blyden, our fifth secretary of state.

Blyden, who himself emigrated to Liberia from the Caribbean some four years following our independence, viewed the national purpose during those formative years in terms of organizing for a resurgence of Africa, initiating a spiritual reconstruction and acceptance of the Industrial Revolution introduced by Europe, for the restoration of the black race to its original integrity. The objection to the "civilizing mission" was not a rejection of Christianity. Rather, it was a rejection of those aspects of European culture presumed integral to Christianity by the West, yet perceived by Blyden and others as nonessential. The objective remained one of disallowing the presumption of European cultural superiority implied in the introduction of the "civilizing mission," yet admitting that interdependence requires cultural pluralism.

Dr. Blyden perceived Liberia as the nucleus of a modern, progressive nation – a synthesis of the best in African and Western cultures. He elaborated a most impressive conception of the role which Liberia was to play on behalf of the entire black race: it was nothing short of demonstrating to the world innate African talents and abilities and making contributions of distinction to humanity.

This debate did not, however, significantly affect the perception entertained by many of a symbol of African liberty which Liberia epitomized, for during most of its history since 1847, and before the independence of other African countries, Liberia

remained, if not an object of pride, a symbol of hope to Pan-African nationalists. Even though relatively small, weak, impecunious and constantly threatened with annihilation at the height of the European Scramble for Africa, our country nevertheless served as a constant reminder that the African experiment in modern self-government could succeed, and that the black man, even under the worst of circumstances, is capable of auto-determination. This relative weakness was transmuted into a symbolic strength, for it is an indisputable fact that Liberia became a rallying point for African cultural and political independence.

As traditionally perceived, then, the national purpose could hardly find fulfillment in the uncertain Century of Survival when the content of the purpose remained an object of debate. Happily, our historic uniqueness in Africa has cast us in the role of an African symbol – a symbol of liberty, a symbol of hope for African emancipation.

We must give thanks to the God of our Fathers who alone guided this republic throughout the uncertainties of that epoch, provided appropriate leadership for each period and brought us safely to the post-war period when in 1947, as we celebrated the first century of our national existence, we could entertain a little more assurance that ours was no more merely an “experiment,” but a consolidating African nationality.

We entered this period on center stage for we continued to be a torchbearer of African liberty. The Guinean leader, President Ahmed Sékou Touré, articulated it well when he declared in 1959, and I quote:

In the history of this new Africa which  
has just come to the world, Liberia has  
a preeminent place because she has been  
for each one of our peoples the living  
proof that our liberty was possible  
and nobody can ignore the fact that the  
star, which marks the Liberian national  
Emblem has been hanging more than a  
century – the sole star which illuminated  
our night of dominated people. Unquote.

The situation, then, seemed more propitious for the elaboration of a national purpose. The post-war phenomenon of African decolonization provided the opportunity for Liberia to gather together the historical strands of the as yet unsettled debate on national purpose.

As Liberia played well the part of a stabilizer/ mediator/conciliator during the Tubman era, one begins to observe the emergence of a concretization of the symbolic role which history had thrust on us as a nation. Of this President Tubman himself declared in 1963, and I quote:

Very early in our evolution as a nation,  
 the architects of our political  
 super-structure imposed upon us the  
 responsibility of a mission in Africa. Despite  
 conflicting interests and the vicissitudes  
 of existence we have been able to  
 implement that mandate to the utmost  
 of our ability and resources; and, in  
 our particular circumstances, in a  
 manner unprecedented in the history of  
 nations ... Unquote.

Truly now, this African vocation which Liberia had chosen suggests to my mind the genesis of a vindication of the views articulated by Edward Wilmot Blyden back in the nineteenth century when he indicated that the true mission (the national purpose) of Liberia in Africa is not the establishment of a black state, based on western ideas, but rather, the attainment of a black nationality having its foundations rooted in African cultural institutions and modified by western thoughts – not a “civilizing mission,” but a redemptive mission of service.

We have utilized our experience of survival through a century of turbulence to serve Africa as she traverses the turbulence of decolonization and the complications of consolidating independence and nationhood. The institutional framework of the OAU, an organization whose shape and content owe much to our country, has been a principal channel of this national effort.

## Defining the National Purpose

### *The Wholesome Functioning Society*

Mr. President, fellow countrymen, and friends:

The continuing Liberian commitment to African regeneration and a larger fulfillment of the aspirations of the African peoples understandably became a consuming pre-occupation of President Tolbert upon his accession to the presidency. As a frame of meaning within which to translate our nation's African vocation, we could employ Dr. Tolbert's conception of the “Wholesome Functioning Society,” as a novel articulation of our national purpose, perhaps its re-definition in light of contemporary exigencies.

“I have come to emblazon against the skies of national destiny, a Wholesome Functioning Society” he declared with compelling confidence and soothing assurance at the debut of his administration. “Wholesome Functioning Society” for Liberia, to

be sure, but always inherent and embodied in the idea of Liberia has been the hopes of African freedom and the restoration of her independence, for since the Lone Star raised her “glowing form on Montserrado’s verdant heights” one hundred and thirty-two years ago, the Republic of Liberia has communed in varying forms with the dispersed African Community. I would therefore venture to say that implicit in the concept of a “wholesome functioning Liberia” is a “wholesome functioning African community.”

It is this accelerated Liberian involvement specifically with continental Africa since the incumbent administration that I wish to dwell on momentarily, and as I do so, I cannot fail to refer to the recent events of historical import in our country, OAU’79.

OAU’79 was an extraordinary highlighting of our African vocation, a veritable “African Homecoming,” which in its sublime meaning again vindicates Blyden as to our national purpose.

In his first inaugural address on January 3, 1972, President Tolbert conveyed an assessment of the OAU which interestingly parallels in some respects, and in others, presages, the bold and timely proposals, which he recently advanced as the organization’s current chairman. He said, and I quote:

Whilst its members can take pride in the  
extent of progress the OAU has achieved  
in the past, and while we must continue  
to direct all our efforts and energies  
toward achieving more abundant success in  
the future, we must, in a moment of  
conscious self-examination, recognize the  
fact that we have not been able to completely  
abandon unwholesome dogmas and complexes,  
to harmonize our priorities, and to fully  
Africanize our thinking in terms of the means  
required to fulfill the aims so lucidly described in the Charter ...

President Tolbert continued:

We are firm in the belief that Africa has the capacity to build a future to meet the ideals and aspirations of the African peoples; and we are committed to the proposition that our collective efforts and resources must be totally harnessed, and a common will developed. Our government, therefore, will use its full potential to strive in the direction of creating a future equal to the rising expectations and legitimate aspirations of our African brethren.

Creating a future in harmony with African rising expectations and legitimate aspirations remains the underlying intent of what OAU Secretary General Eden Kodjo

characterized as the “historic break-through with dynamic decisions,” of the Sixteenth Summit.

The fundamental features of this “break-through” are, in my view, crystallized in President Tolbert’s clarion call on Africa, significantly inclusive of all Liberians, that we never retreat from eternal principles, at the same time that we never recoil from the timely and the practical. “We must blend our respect for Principles with appropriate re-interpretations of those Principles,” he courageously asserted.

The OAU is now poised not only for Africa’s total political liberation and a more meaningful pursuit of its economic emancipation, but to render the continental society more wholesome and more functional, to again make man the object and subject of our every action; in short, to restore to every African man, woman and child his dignity and the full exercise of his fundamental human rights.

Mr. President, Fellow Countrymen, and Friends:

There is always a close inter-relationship between a nation’s domestic policy and its foreign policy; in fact, foreign policy is domestic policy by other means. In offering her services to Africa at this time, first by hosting OAU’79 and now by shouldering the weighty responsibilities of the Current Chairmanship, Liberia believes, I am persuaded, that she is possessed of the wherewithal to gather Africa together for action at this historic moment in fulfillment of a significant dimension of her national purpose. This service offered to Africa is not to promote Liberia but to promote liberty, not in a singleness of pursuit but in elevated fraternal collaboration.

But only a strong Liberia can live up to the expectations of this African leadership. Only a Liberia in the committed process of creating a genuinely wholesome functioning society at home can command the international attention required to build a wholesome functioning Africa.

Already we have ample evidence of sincere efforts to make Liberia truly strong. There is greater involvement by a greater percentage of the population with the national enterprise. There is an ongoing program to curtail ignorance, arrest disease, and minimize poverty. There has been both growth and development of the national economy over the past eight years. An analysis of the details and a pronouncement of the judgment are appropriately left to history.

What remains ours to do as a people with at least one hundred and thirty-two years of history to reflect upon is to concentrate on the unfinished task of nation building in our own proverbial backyard and throughout Mother Africa.

We must work without ceasing for our own upliftment and for the cause for which this republic stands. We must forever assure our inner strength (the essence of our national soul) of cohesion and singleness of purpose. This inner strength will be assured as we emphasize spiritual values and apply in our every relationship the African ideal of hospitality, friendliness, honesty, equity, truth, justice, and the brotherhood of man.

As a people, we traversed the “century of survival” because we retained our inner strength amidst the vicissitudes of that epoch. Now more than ever we need the inner strength to continue to bear in Africa the torch of liberty. The requirements for this are today more exacting for the whole world with all its vices and virtues is in upon us, and we can consequently hardly develop in relative isolation, as was the case in yesteryears.

Mr. President, fellow countrymen, and friends:

It seems to me that in the same manner as there were those in the past century who accepted the Euro-American perception of the “Civilizing Mission” as our national purpose, there are, I would venture to say, some today who believe that we can bear this torch of African liberty through the second century of our national independence and through the remaining period of decolonization in a national setting whose fundamental character should remain unaffected by meaningful change and appropriate re-interpretations in the national interest.

I submit that to follow this course would be tantamount to a desecration of the sacred memories of our sainted ancestors and forefathers, would prove devastatingly counterproductive, and could rob us of the mantle of moral leadership which it has pleased Providence to bestow upon this glorious land of liberty.

But thanks be to God that we have in William R. Tolbert, Jr. a leader not only equal to the requirements of the hour but also sensitive to the national imperative in the expanse of time.

It is this identical quality of informed and compassionate leadership which President Tolbert brings to the Chairmanship of the Organization of African Unity.

We are, all of us, under sacred national commitment to totally involve ourselves and serve as bases of support for our leader during this year when Liberia serves Africa,

For, after all, this ennobling enterprise, is nothing less than an extraordinary opportunity, perhaps the first of its kind in our history, when a truly significant percentage of our national population can honestly identify with a national purpose, externally projected.

We have, perhaps for the first time in our history the largest consensus for a foreign policy activity. All of this takes on more meaning because a respectable majority identifies with the undertaking such that the projection of the concept of the “Wholesome Functioning Society” to the African scene, bears good omen for its acceptance in time as an important ingredient of our national purpose.

### *Conclusion*

Mr. President, fellow countrymen, and friends:

The national purpose, *our* “Manifest Destiny,” will emerge more clearly and find the expected fulfillment only as we together build a strong Liberia, morally first and

foremost, based on even greater social justice and fuller equality of opportunities; and also as we continuously cultivate a national predisposition to unceasingly “blend our respect for Principles with appropriate re-interpretations of those Principles.”

The national purpose will emerge more clearly as we, from this vantage point of moral unassailability, contribute our quota as a people to a restoration of the African personality, to the genuine unity of our peoples and our continent,

Humanity itself will be enriched and uplifted thereby, and the world will richly benefit therefrom.

The challenge is for one year as current Chairman of the OAU; the challenge is for the remaining years of this century; but the greatest challenge is for the twenty-first century during which our nation, under Almighty God, will celebrate its second century of existence.

We must have faith in ourselves, and faith in the guiding hands of the God of our Fathers, to face, in the words of Reinhold Niebuhr, the “Hazardous Future.”

May Almighty God grant!

I thank you.



# The University of the South Resolution of Appreciation



## The University of the South Resolution of Appreciation

Whereas it is difficult to sum up more than thirty years of scholarship, teaching, and service in a brief resolution, what follows is the political science department's attempt to convey to our esteem and good wishes for our colleague Elwood Dunn. Elwood's negotiating skills, self-effacing character, dignity, and integrity are respected and will be fondly remembered by the Sewanee community and diplomatic circles in the U.S. and Liberia.

Political science was a natural home for Elwood for his life has been steeped in politics. Elwood rose to the rank of Minister of State for Presidential Affairs in Liberia under the elected government of William Tolbert, but the violent overthrow of that government forced him out of office and to leave Liberia for a more secure life here. Liberia's loss has been Sewanee's gain. Yet, ever since his arrival at Sewanee, two countries – his native land, Liberia, and his new country, the United States – have consumed Elwood's attention.

Unable to return to Liberia for more than two decades due to political rivalries there, Elwood turned his attention to academic matters in Sewanee. He has taught countless students about politics in Africa, international organizations such as the United Nations and the African Union, and post-conflict reconstruction. His expertise and personal experience in the politics of Sub-Saharan Africa enlivened and added poignancy to the lessons that he imparted to his students.

Elwood also has been an engaged researcher and a leading voice on Liberian affairs, serving as editor of the *Liberian Studies Journal* during the period 1985-1995, reporting often to the State Department, and twice appearing on the PBS Newshour. Through his work with the Model United Nations group and his personal participation in politics in Liberia, Elwood has modeled for his students and colleagues what it means to be a politically engaged academic. Although one wonders how he found time, he also authored or co-authored numerous articles and ten books on Liberian politics and international relations, four of them since 2000. Clearly, he has shown no signs of diminishing productivity. In fact, Elwood is a tireless researcher who rarely takes time off for vacations. His summers have been filled with research trips to archives and to Liberia, as well as the production of research manuscripts.

This extraordinary scholarship complemented rather than undercut Elwood's commitment to his students. Even after moving to Chattanooga, he was in his office four days a week, often the first in the department to arrive and the last to leave. His office door was almost always open, welcoming his students and faculty colleagues. Students arriving at his door were invariably greeted with a hearty welcome, good humor, and sincere interest in them and their projects. An invaluable mentor especially for international students, Elwood was gracious and kind to all students, always free with his time to help them find their passions and purpose. Junior colleagues sought him out for conversation on international events, which helped to create an intellectual home for them in the department.

Elwood also applied his diplomatic skills to slightly less fractured (and let us say, less violent) political situations on Sewanee's campus, including chairing the political science department and leading faculty discussions on the creation of an international and global studies program. Over a decade ago, he convened discussions of parties that had an interest – both pro and con – in the creation of an international studies program. Feelings were strong on both sides of the debate, but Elwood's gracious handling of those meetings helped all parties to remain friends throughout the process. Those early discussions laid the foundation for the creation of the current international and global studies program.

The 2005 election of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, with whom Elwood served in government during the 1970s, to the presidency of Liberia, provided him renewed opportunities to have a role in the political development and reconciliation process in his native Liberia. Over the last seven years, he has shuttled back and forth to Liberia to help with the reconstruction of political order and to produce investigative reports on political events and processes, a signal of his commitment to peace and development in his home country and the high regard in which he is held there.

Elwood's family, including his wife, Matilda and children, one of whom, Sedaris, attended Sewanee, contributed greatly to the community. Matilda went on to be ordained in the Episcopal Church and to serve a parish in Chattanooga. Undoubtedly, she and Elwood will continue to serve the church, their community, and their native country with grace and dignity.

Today, we honor Elwood Dunn's many accomplishments and contributions to his students, to his colleagues, and to his native country of Liberia. Please rise and join me in expressing our sincerest gratitude for over thirty years of extraordinary service.

*Adopted by a rising vote of the Faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences  
May 2, 2012*

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Adopted by a rising vote of the Faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences

May 2, 2012

# **Renewing Our National Promise, an Address Delivered by D. Elwood Dunn on the Occasion of the One Hundred and Sixty-fifth Anniversary of the Declaration of Independence of the Republic of Liberia, Centennial Memorial Pavilion, Monrovia, Republic of Liberia July 26, 2012**

Your Excellency Madam President

Your Excellency President Ernest Bai Koroma of the Sister Republic of Sierra Leone

Mr. Vice President

Mr. Speaker, Mr. President Pro Tempore and Members of the Legislature

Mr. Chief Justice and Members of the Judiciary

Members of the Cabinet

Mr. Doyen and Members of the Diplomatic Corps

The Special Representative of the Secretary General of the United Nations Prelates and

Members of the Clergy

Officials of Government

Council of Chiefs and Elders

Fellow Liberians

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

Friends

Madam President, I renew to you my gratitude for your gracious invitation to perform this national ritual on our country's Natal Day. I am fully sensitive to "the circumstances and thoughts that led to my selection." It is my fervent hope that what I say here today will serve to lift a people "long forlorn to nobler destiny."

I come to this task fully conscious of the efforts by government and citizens alike in restoring our country, especially in the aftermath of our recent national calamity. Perspectives naturally vary as to the right framework, the right course of action and the right order of priority, and a debate of sorts has already been joined. Perhaps this national platform provides me the privileged opportunity to join that national debate.

Our country is 165 years old! We have come a long way, on a long tumultuous journey, a journey, punctuated by weariness and dreariness, struggle and strife, a historic journey opened to a multiplicity of interpretations. Yet we continue that journey as one country and one people. We engage today the power of pause to reflect upon

where we stand on this continuing and unending national journey. And as we pause to re-calibrate, I invite you to reflect with me on the topic:

#### RENEWING OUR NATIONAL PROMISE

In its “Declaration of Rights,” our founding Constitution proclaimed a national promise: “Therefore we the People of the Commonwealth of Liberia, in Africa. ... do, in order ... to establish justice, insure domestic peace, and promote the general welfare, hereby solemnly associate and constitute ourselves a Free, Sovereign and Independent State, by the name of The Republic of Liberia.”

In the beginning was the promise. That promise took the form of an ideal left to be perfected by succeeding generations, left to be nurtured by succeeding generations, left to be rendered increasingly more meaningful, more relevant to the changing needs of a continuously changing Liberian population. Like the founders of states everywhere, no promise remains static. A more perfect country remains ours to build, today, as it was for those of yesteryears, and will be for those tomorrow. Thus, we have moved in time from “We the people of the Commonwealth of Liberia” to a wider embrace of “We the People” resident in all 38,000 square miles of our national territory, incorporating today 15 political subdivisions inhabited by scores of ethno-linguistic groups, including categories yet to be clearly delineated.

This is the situation as I speak. Liberia started small in fact and in concept. Expansion, including that of the mind, was inevitable. Just as we face today the imperative of re-defining the idea of Liberia, future generations will find the need to re-define their nation, their Liberia, taking into account the exigencies of that future. Liberia is a continuum, never frozen in time and space. It is an idea of infinite possibilities. And it is our duty as inheritors of that promise made almost two centuries ago to renew the charge given the challenges of our time.

Accordingly, I will briefly address the topic in two parts:

The first part will be to contextualize or remind us about the “what,” the “why,” and the “how” of our national experience, while the second part will offer some thoughts on the role of values in national reconstruction.

Madam President, fellow citizens, and friends:

History has been defined as a discourse or a dialogue between the past and the present. We cannot escape being a part of that dialogue for that past, our past, remains an integral part of our national DNA. We must thus seek to appreciate the nineteenth-century context in which the original promise of Liberia was made. I am not here speaking about material context, but the context, indeed also the contest of ideas. Liberia for some was one idea, one vision, for others yet another. We must come to grips with our own idea of Liberia. But first, the earlier debate that was initiated 165 years ago must be appreciated. It was a debate about chosen direction, vision, identity, and purpose. When the potted plant of the Liberian state was brought from overseas for implantation in West African soil, it came with a Euro- American purpose, a mission of

enlightenment and civilization in the Western sense. Two decades later, an alternative paradigm or vision was proffered, that of blending Western and African values symbolized by planting the state firmly in African soil.

As J. J. Roberts and his political theorist Hilary Teague moved forward in initiating their vision of building a “little America” in early nineteenth-century West Africa, Edward Wilmot Blyden, perhaps Liberia’s foremost original thinker, proffered some two decades later a very different vision, a very different national purpose. Even in those formative years Blyden thought of Liberia as the nucleus of a modern, progressive nation: a synthesis of the best in African and Western cultures. Teague and Blyden then, in their respective advocacies became the progenitors of the Liberian dilemma: a civilizing mission or the development of an African nationality that blends elements from the dual heritage of Africa and the West.

But no, we are not heirs to just two heritages. We the people of the Republic of Liberia, like other peoples on this vast continent of ours, are children not of two but of a triple heritage: the Traditional African heritage, the heritage of Islamic civilization, and the Western heritage. We are not one or the other. We are a composite of all three. Quickly disposing of the Traditional African heritage, in which we live, and move, and have our being, we can cite the Vai proverb: “What is mine goes, what is ours abides.” Or we can reference a study by the late Bishop George Browne of the Episcopal Church drawing parallels between African traditional religions and Old Testament Christianity.

Islamic civilization first came to North Africa in the seventh century and then percolated over many centuries downwards through Sub-Saharan Africa. That civilization became a part of the Liberian experience before the 1822 colonial settlement and the 1847 Declaration of Independence. In fact, this Universalist religion accompanied with its own culture first came to the Liberia area in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Prominent Liberian explorers not only confirm this Islamic presence in their nineteenth-century Liberia, but Liberian Muslims impacted the process of Liberian state formation as witnessed by the roles of prominent Muslims Zulu Duma and Sao Boso. The culture of Islam has remained an integral part of the Liberian national journey initiated 165 years ago.

I need not now elaborate on the Western heritage, for it has been and continues to be so pervasive though with different emphases depending on the era, that we need a separate debate about what and what not to accept coming from the West: the classic dilemma of acceptance and rejection.

What has been the impact on us of these heritages? What sort of people have we become as a consequence of the triple experiences? The impact of these heritages has obviously varied in time and space. Some have enjoyed privileges more than others. Our exposure to the three has been uneven, and this has left in its wake a certain misunderstanding. As we contemplate a more genuine unification of our people, we need to revisit this issue of the impact of our triple heritage on us as a people,

bringing all three to the table or the palaver hut of national unification, integration, and reconciliation.

Contextualizing the Liberian experience also means acknowledging dissent or political opposition in the history of Liberia. Liberia has had its market place of ideas before the contemporary “Brouhaha.” Before the hegemonic True Whig Party came to power, there was lively political competition even within a circumscribed political community. The TWP never went unchallenged in its 133 years of hegemony. The 1970s was a time of much dissent in our country, and some of the ideas generated from that period remain as yet unrealized, given the military intervention, the devastating civil war that followed, and the lack of national focus on value issues since then.

Dissent is healthy. It helps us to self-correct. It helps us come to terms with ourselves. Perhaps leading us to imagine narratives other than, and in addition to the one of conventional wisdom whose derivatives we have yet to subject to scrutiny; perhaps helping us address our national identity problematic; perhaps helping us see Liberia as a whole, not the caricature that often passes for conventional wisdom; perhaps leading us to undertake a national dissection such that we lay bare ALL of the component parts of our national make-up; perhaps revealing to ourselves a clearer number of human groups that compose the Liberian mosaic; perhaps allowing ourselves the opportunity to self-identify, not excluding a large potential category of hybrid-Liberians, a cross between or among groups. Here I am alluding to a critical population reconfiguration that could well result in a future sociological paradigm shift. Perhaps that shift has already occurred and we have yet to recognize it.

And now we return to the “what,” “why,” and “how” questions that contextualize our national experience. What? In the beginning of Liberia there was a contestation of visions, but a single vision prevailed for long and shaped the country’s development or evolution. Why? Because of the preferences and prejudices of the era. How? Competing visions or dissident views were routinely ignored. Consider how one historian described the reaction of the Liberian people to Dr. Edward Wilmot Blyden and his time, and I quote: “Blyden’s oratorical prowess thrilled his hearers but did not change social norms. He was rewarded with distant diplomatic appointments in Europe. He was fluent in a number of languages including Arabic – but if he had learned Kru and began to express his challenge from Sasstown he would have been considered more threatening than the Court of St. James in [faraway] England.” Unquote.

Through historical twists and turns, Roberts and Teague and their ideological heirs retained for long the ascendancy. But the ideas of Blyden and Co. were never extinguished. They awaited and still await, propitious times. Might those times be our time? Are we ready to answer the clarion call of this age, are we ready to seize this seminal moment and build an inclusive Liberia on the solid foundations of our triple heritage? Are we ready to collaborate with our West African sisters and brothers, with whom we



share so much in this post-colonial, supra-nationalist age, as we all move into a new era of shared interconnection and cooperation?

Madam President, fellow Liberians, and friends:

Renewing our national promise also means moving toward a more united Liberia. We must do more than merely proclaim a “Unification Policy” or perpetuate a National Unification Day based on a flawed policy. Nor must we assume that our divisions will cease without conscious effort, without our being intentional about the matter.

But even here, context matters. We are not here seeking to re-invent the wheel. The Liberian nation-building process has a past that, for good or ill, has become ingrained in our national DNA. We speak English with a unique Liberian accent. We have even developed a “Liberian English” that we seem to refuse to consider a lingua franca. We have a national cuisine, perhaps several. We have many national types of attire. We have put a Liberian twist to the universalistic religions of Christianity and Islam, to which we have converted. We continue to struggle to address the kinks or flaws in our original African Traditional Religions.

The question before us then is how we might employ the instruments of culture learning and education broadly conceived to craft a strategy to take us from identification as cultural freaks to recognized cultural integrity, from being like bats, not knowing whether we are beasts or birds, to a greater clarity about what we have become as consequence of our exposure to the outside world.

Defining the intangible dimension of our national reconstruction imperatives:

And so, Madam President, fellow Liberians, and friends: As we celebrate today 165 years of independence the state of our country impels us, perhaps compels us to seek opportunities and infrastructure for mediation, mediation to address historic divides and divides of more recent vintage such as the generational or all those things that make us still an un-reconciled people, mediation to address the polarization in this society, mediation to bridge the unacceptable divide between the sea of poverty that pervades our nation and the handful among us who enjoy wealth and privilege, mediation that will take us to the streets of our cities and towns to seek out those traumatized and disabled by war, mediation in short that will lead us to acknowledge our dysfunctional society and conscientiously seek to render it indeed more functional and more wholesome.

Now, let me make myself clear. I am not here disparaging the efforts of many who are trying to address some of these issues. I am aware that local and foreign resources have been employed, indeed deployed, for this purpose. I am aware that government agencies have made it a part of public policy to do likewise. What I am talking about, however, are the intangible dimensions of the issues, the values dimension without which we navigate without a compass. I am talking about national values deficits (not budget deficits, not electric power deficits ...). I am talking about empathy, solidarity, trust, justice, honesty, sincerity, mutual goodwill, social responsibility, mutual respect,

a sense of common identity, accountability, innovation, and tolerance. All of these notions are closely interrelated. They all add up to what might be called a national moral deficit. This is quintessentially or basically the intangible I earlier alluded to. You see, it is real; it is there; it will not just go away. Without a measure of moral commitment to Liberia, indeed moral investment, we risk everything: our traditional security, our human security, and the sustainability of all the material reconstruction on which we are today embarked with near religious zeal. Why? Because in the nature of things, if we remain a society of gross inequality, of social alienation, of distrust, of injustice, of conflicting identities, the “WE” remains weak and will collapse when faced with the inevitable moment of national stress.

Perhaps, just perhaps what we need is a serious consideration of how we might harness our culture (even our cultures) in service to the nation. And so, the intangibles boil down to our national culture problematic. Call it the humanities (a study of the human condition) or the arts (the imaginative and creative branches of knowledge), but what we need is a critical evaluation of values on a big scale, in high and low places in our country – at all societal levels – the home, the business community, education community, faith community, community of the professions, the media, the Diaspora in all its diversity and on all continents.

Consider the challenge at hand! Consider what we are experiencing, and its impact on us! Seemingly two competing streams invite our attention: The first is from abroad where we uncritically receive a deluge of books, magazines, films, DVDs, videos, CDs, even foreign national propaganda (VOA, BBC, Radio France International, China News Agency, etc). They are all well funded and professionally packaged and promoted by major organizations and lobbies. Whether intentional or not, this stream has the cumulative effect of reinforcing our national sense of inferiority vis-à-vis the societies from which such products emanate. Have you considered the effects on us of drinking so deep into other people’s culture and relegating our own to the margins? This is why I earlier used the term “cultural freaks,” or, being like the bat, not knowing whether we are beasts or birds.

The second stream, the domestic alternative to this external effort has never been organized or funded. Sure, whether from the past or the present, there are Liberian artists, scholars, and creative entrepreneurs at work plying their respective trades. But they seem to be moving in many different directions. Not only does the field lack coherence, it fuels disunity. Our histories have emphasized conflicts between competing groups (although all histories, including our own, are replete with both conflict and cooperation). We wouldn’t be here today 165 years later as one people had our relationship been characterized only by conflict to the exclusion of cooperation. Can we imagine an alternative to the book “The Evolution of Deadly Conflict in [the history] of Liberia?” Some anthropologists stress particularism to the exclusion of cross-group interaction and collaboration. We often say much about social cleavages without a

word about many other crosscutting cleavages whereby we have, like all peoples, multiple identities. Folktales are categorized by ethnic groups; although anyone growing up in Liberia knows that “spider” belongs to no one group.

On this critical subject of studying the human condition as expressed in Liberia, what contributions might be possible to our common enterprise from literature, history, economy, the arts, law, just to highlight a few.

**Literature:** We should encourage the development of stories (written, oral, or video) that promote empathy across lines of division such as ethnic, religious, or regional. We should do so by offering prizes to “writers” of such stories. Consider the European historical experience that traces the development of human rights sensibilities and feelings of nationhood to “the novel” form. Folklore was useful in fueling feelings of nationhood in nineteenth-century Europe, and we could appropriate this art form to our national re-making effort.

**History:** or that great dialogue between the past and the present. We should encourage Liberian historians to hash out a national narrative that is truthful, inclusive, and does not shift blame from individual wrongdoing to groups whether in the distant past or more recently. Rwanda and South Africa, two African countries successfully digging themselves out of conflict, provide models we might explore. As does UNESCO, with experience in production of the UNESCO History of Africa series, the first authoritative narrative of the history of the African peoples written largely by African scholars. It is vital that the process of a history-writing project be de-politicized. We cannot remain mired in the social and political sniping between the polarized versions of Liberian history.

We should consider as well museums as critical sites of “social remembering” that help to facilitate construction of national narratives, preservation of collective memory and production of a national culture.

**Economy:** Here too, there is a values dimension for the full story of the Liberian economy is not alone the ubiquitous “growth without development” thesis of the 1960s. If we went back to the 1860s, we would discover a Liberian entrepreneurship characterized by self-reliance, innovation, creativity, and risk-taking. These early Liberian business people produced goods and services that they then traded internally and externally and held their own for decades. Goods produced in Liberia were transported to Europe in Liberian built vessels. With the initiation of patronage politics by what became a hegemonic True Whig Party, politics soon became king. The Open-Door Policy that made politics king then sealed the fate of independent Liberian business. A paradigm shift to a rent-seeking economy, incompatible with productivity, innovation, and self-reliance, has bedeviled us since. We must borrow a page from our past to restore the creative and innovative entrepreneurial spirit.

**Law:** A number of issues commend themselves here. We should consider requiring law students to offer pro bono services to indigent clients, and strongly encourage

lawyers to do the same. Without justice for the poor, stability will remain elusive. We face a problem of constitutional inadequacy. Many here and listening to me out there will recall how we ended up with the current Constitution of 1986. A constitution drafted by professionals was in 1983 subjected to substantial editing by a panel of politicians. It was the politically edited draft that, under circumstances of military rule, became the constitution bequeathed to us. Since the end of the civil war in 2003, we have tiptoed around the issue of constitutional review and reform. Two full-fledged and seemingly permanent government institutions have been created in large measure to fix our constitutional and governance problems. We still labor today under a dysfunctional constitution replete with conflicts of land law, trial law, and other dualities of customary and statutory laws. An American colleague has rightly characterized presidential powers under the present constitution thus, and I quote: "The president's power is still lying around like a loaded gun." Unquote. Aside from the potential for abuse, such hyper-presidential powers could create the impression among ordinary Liberians that political hegemony is normal. There may be benevolence and probity in the present regime. What guarantees do we have for future regimes?

There are other important issues. I understand that we continue to use today the anachronistic "Rules and Regulations for Administering the Hinterland" that once vested all powers of governing in the "Secretary of the Interior," today the Minister of Internal Affairs. As well, the issue of dual citizenship looms large for Liberians residing abroad, a significant national resource that we alienate to our detriment.

Then there is the issue of our national symbols and awards. We seem to talk about this issue interminably without the national will to act. I wonder, I just wonder, for example, whether anyone has carefully read the citations to such national awards as "The Liberian Humane Order of African Redemption," or "The Most Venerable Order of Knighthood of the Pioneers of the Republic of Liberia." The wordings are a throw-back to nineteenth-century provincialism, and as such these awards need to be complemented with others more relevant to contemporary circumstances. Post-apartheid South Africa's experience in these regards could prove salutary or beneficial.

The Arts: We should recognize the role of creative and expressive culture in national integration or re-integration, national reconciliation, and national unity. Literature, poetry, music, dance, painting, plays, folktales, proverbs, and parables are all critical assets in nation building. We should encourage the development and distribution of art works that promote themes of justice, equity, and unity. We might do this by offering incentives and prizes to creators of such works. There are many examples elsewhere for such undertakings designed to help audiences "feel" conditions experienced by citizens who are different from themselves, different ethnically, different religiously, and in diverse other ways. Given our divisions and deep-seated feelings of distrust, this work would best be undertaken by civil society, with limited government involvement.

We should recognize that investing in the arts is also investing in national security: job opportunities, a more united nation, conscious and respectful of its component parts, with a strengthened sense of collective security, thus obviating exploitation of genuine differences by the disaffected at home and abroad.

There are many models for undertaking this imperative national work. Four come to mind: The Arts Council in South Africa, the Social Service of Commerce in Brazil, the United States National Endowment for the Arts, and the United States National Endowment for the Humanities. The Social Service of Commerce in Brazil is described as “a private nonprofit entity whose role is enshrined in the national constitution, with its budget derived from a 1.5 percent payroll tax imposed on and collected by Brazilian companies; as the workforce in this nation of nearly 200 million people expands, so does the organization’s budget.”

Relevancy for Liberia: I believe that we should employ the arts and humanities as vehicles for promoting genuine reconciliation and unity by undertaking the following specifics:

1. That we set aside a reasonable percentage of revenue generated from iron mining and oil extraction to be placed in a locked box for arts and humanities activities.
2. That we supplement such funds with fundraising at home and abroad, especially among Liberians residing abroad.
3. That as fundraising is most effective if a self-help effort is already in place, I recommend (a) a negotiated transfer of the E.J. Roye Building here on Ashmun Street to a National Arts and Humanities Council of Liberia. The building is already appropriately configured for such an enterprise. Spaces could be rented cheaply to artists and arts organizations that meet certain criteria, and other spaces could be rented at market value to help fund the organization, and (b) we immediately appropriate the idea of a “Liberia Youth Corps” with the specific goal of bringing together young people from diverse educational, political, cultural and religious backgrounds in campaigns that inculcate a culture of service and engender a common sense of nationhood. Social learning programs in other societies have increased students’ sense of social responsibility, compassion, tolerance, and belonging to a broader community. I have personally fond recollections of the impact of The National Student Christian Council of Liberia and the late David Howell’s YMCA on my own social learning experience. Youth are critical to any country’s future especially our own, given the demographic imperative. Unless we invest adequately in their future, we leave them a poisoned inheritance.

Now, though investing in such intangibles may require an enabling role for government, the weight of responsibility for this undertaking must fall squarely on the shoulders of civil society and must involve Liberian leaders at all societal levels – business, faith (churches, mosques, groves of our African traditional religions), educational, professional, philanthropic – all must show the courage to lead. Furthermore, under the

auspices of the proposed National Arts and Humanities Council of Liberia, consideration should be given to implementing at least two priority projects. The first is to partner with government in the full restoration and expansion of The Kendeja National Culture Center. I say expansion because I believe that we need a national culture center in each of our 15 political subdivisions. Such centers must become venues for establishing, nurturing, showcasing, studying, and celebrating our cultural heritage.

The second priority project for the new Council is to transform into an area of historic preservation the land and key buildings here in the heart of Monrovia bounded as follows: Starting at the corners of Broad/Buchanan and Broad/Ashmun Streets housing the current “National Museum” and this edifice, the Centennial Memorial Pavilion, and continuing along both Broad and Ashmun Streets to the corners of Broad/Randall and Ashmun/Randall Streets housing the Executive Pavilion and the old Executive Mansion.

Beyond these, and building upon traditional knowledge systems, I also recommend the establishment of an ad hoc panel of citizens to help sort out issues in our society arising from conflict of values. I have in mind such issues as sassawood or “trial by ordeal,” a modern role for traditional chiefs, conflict of international human rights values and traditional values, the modernization of the Poro and Sande institutions, traditional healing arts and modern medicine.

Education: Our modern educational institutions must be at the heart of any engagement that seeks to appropriate the humanities and arts in building national unity. For in its primary mission of preparing our young people “to think creatively, read critically, construct effective arguments using persuasive evidence, write clearly, remain flexible and look at issues with an open mind,” our schools and universities must also be places for the transmission of the society’s core values, attitudes and mores. To do this, a national core curriculum review may be necessary, for a productive educational system must be driven “by a culturally sensitive and balanced curriculum.” Do we have one in place today? That’s not what I learned from a recent study by Sister Mary Laurene Browne. We must revisit our curriculum at all levels in our educational system.

And we must do one more thing regarding educating our youth. Following the model of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, let us target here and now every six-year-old across this land. Let us set a goal of closely monitored quality education for them, so that come 2030, we might unveil a new generation of Liberians superbly prepared to play their roles in a twenty-first century Liberia, indeed a twenty-first century world.

### **Conclusion**

And so, Madam President, fellow Liberians, and friends:

Let us then, one and all, solemnly resolve, in this place and at this time, to re-launch our country, to renew our country’s promise, to build a stronger Liberia not alone of

bricks and mortar but fundamentally of values, to build a country inclusive of all our experiences since we began together this arduous national journey 165 years ago. Let us build against the backdrop of our triple heritage.

Let us do all of these things, and more, linking today's Liberia to yesterday's, and then let us affect a social paradigm shift as we resolve to build a modern African nation that participates fully in the African renaissance and remains open to wholesome contemporary global cultural streams.

Let us re-enforce the national foundations of our common heritage, so that 35 years hence, when Liberia moves into its third century of nationhood, it will have made genuine progress toward fulfilling the national promise "to establish justice, insure domestic peace, and promote the general welfare."

I THANK YOU FOR YOUR KIND ATTENTION. LONG LIVE LIBERIA!  
GOD, BLESS LIBERIA!



## Reflections on Research Challenges as LSA Turns Fifty

Keynote Address delivered by:

D. Elwood Dunn

50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference

Liberian Studies Association

April 19–21

Rochester Institute of Technology, New York

Dear Colleagues and Friends;

All Protocol Observed:

I became aware of and joined the Liberian Studies Association in the early 1970s when the association was not more than four years old. I have therefore grown up with LSA and experienced much of its growing challenges. On this auspicious occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of LSA, I would like to reflect with you on some contemporary challenges facing the Liberia research community.

Let me, however, start by doing two things: The first is to thank the current leadership of LSA for the kind invitation to attend conference/2018 and address you on this 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary milestone. The second thing I feel obligated to do is to pay homage to the visionary founders of LSA. In 1968, Professor Svend E. Holsoe, then of DePaul University, and Professor David M. Foley of the University of Georgia, two American scholars of the Liberia experience secured a grant from the Carnegie Foundation and launched in the fall of that year the Liberian Studies Journal (LSJ), forerunner of the Liberian Studies Association (LSA). From the first, and unstructured gathering at Stanford University in 1969 of scholars and students from the United States, Liberia, and other countries, the LSA has endured through the vicissitudes of Liberia's own turbulent history.

But we must today do a bit more than chronicle the events of LSA, important though they are. We must place at the center of these celebrations the *raison d'être* for research on and about the nation and people of Liberia. In this regard, I would like to invoke the memory of the late former President of the University of Liberia, Mary Antoinette Brown Sherman, whose scholarship thrust was the nexus between knowledge and development, or knowledge in service to development. See, for example, her 1967 doctoral dissertation that makes the compelling case for synthesizing traditional and western education in service to Liberia's holistic development. Note also Dr. Sherman's presidential address to the semi-annual conference of the Liberian

Research Association in Monrovia in 1968, where she spoke on the timely topic: “the status of scientific research in Liberia.”

To the question why study Liberia or why a forum devoted to the study of Liberia, the answer inevitably is two-fold: one, to serve the end of disinterested pursuit and advancement of knowledge and, two, to serve the end of development of the nation and people of Liberia.

Drawing my own inspiration from the life work of the late Dr. Sherman, I propose in this address to dwell on the research/development nexus or the quest to make research relevant to Liberia's development. Though many other perspectives are conceivable, I have come here today to suggest that LSA at 50 consider taking a critical look at the state of scholarship on Liberia with a view to addressing some of the issues bearing on the welfare and wellbeing of the Liberian people.

Let us now briefly recall how the LSA went from an unstructured gathering of scholars to the subsequent emergence of a semblance of structure. Following about a decade of unstructured academic research on Liberia, particularly in the aftermath of African decolonization in the late 1950s/early 1960s, Stanford University was the first venue in 1969 with Dr. John Gay, Professor Martin Lowenkopf, and then graduate student and later University Professor C.E. Zamba Liberty joining the prime movers in effectively launching the LSA. The participants resolved to meet regularly and share research on Liberia. The individual hosting the meeting traditionally served as coordinator of the effort until the following year.

In 1970, Professor J. Gus Liebenow hosted the conference at Indiana University. Scholars convened seven other informal annual gatherings at university centers in the United States, for example, Delaware in 1972 (the first I attended), Iowa in 1973, and Michigan in 1974. By 1978, those attending the conference at Boston University decided formally to establish the Liberian Studies Association. LSA has met with regularity since then. In 1978, the LSJ, which had operated independently, was transferred to the LSA. The membership also drafted a constitution and bylaws and elected Svend Holsoe as the first Secretary/Treasurer of the association. Holsoe in this way handled the affairs of the association until 1985 when Dr. Thomas Hendrix succeeded Holsoe. Hendrix died in 1994 and successors were Dr. Arnold Odio and Dr. Dianne Oyler before the election of Dr. Mary Moran, our dedicated current Secretary/Treasurer.

Holsoe incorporated another unit devoted to the study of Liberia: The Institute for Liberian Studies, Inc, in 1978/79. Located in Philadelphia, the Institute came to hold perhaps the richest collection available anywhere of research material on Liberia. It published while it lasted monographs and working papers on Liberia. Some here may be aware of the fact that these pioneering Holsoe efforts constitute the core of the now prestigious Indiana University Liberia Collections.

Though still an under-studied country, scholars at home and abroad have for long busied themselves with trying to understand Africa's first republic. There is an

impressive and growing list of fine Liberian scholars but they seem to be of recent vintage. Because of both time factor and concern that I may not include all, I will refrain from naming at this time. Suffice it now to consider my 1995 compilation of the Liberia volume of the *World Bibliographical Series* as a handy source for earlier publications on Liberia. Efforts on the ground in Liberia have been spasmodic and perhaps remain so today. Browsing through my personal collection I have come across issues of the *Liberian Research Association Journal* which appeared irregularly through the 1980s; *Cuttington University College Research Journal*, which was also published in the 1980s; *University of Liberia Journal*, which was first published in 1958 and irregularly thereafter to the 1980s; the *Liberian Historical Review* (publication of the Liberian Historical Society which functioned between 1964 and 1972); and the *Liberian Law Journal* which was published in the 1960s. Before the advent of the Internet there were other publication efforts such as the Germany-based Liberia-Forum that published in the 1980s.

In a word, the efforts at systematically studying Liberia have hardly been a sustained one before the beginning of LSA. Interests have waxed and waned. And Liberian scholars have themselves remained largely at the margins of Liberian studies both before and since the start of LSA. The fact must be inserted, however, that there were early Liberian thinkers and literary figures who sought to define a Liberian national purpose. But in more contemporary times John Payne Mitchell earned a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago in 1955 and chose the career of a government bureaucrat. Augustus Feweh Caine similarly earned a Ph.D. from Michigan State University and ended his career as chairman of the National Democratic Party of Liberia. Though Dr. Abeodu Bowen Jones and her spouse, Dr. A.E. Nyema Jones earned doctorates respectively from Northwestern University and the University of Chicago and made contributions to scholarship, they too were largely generators of ideas within governing bureaucracies. Liberia cried out then, and she does today, for Liberians trained in the various professions to define, deepen, and broaden the scope of Liberian studies.

And so, there are many challenges facing Liberian studies today. Again, I return to the question of *raison d'être* for research on Liberia, the nexus between Liberian studies and Liberia's development. As we pay homage to founders, should we be critically examining what they have bequeathed to us so as to take Liberian studies to another level, or as some would say, liberate Liberian studies from certain shackles? What are the lessons that we can draw from the series of ethnographic studies undertaken in the last decades of the twentieth century? And how have the more glamorous studies of Liebenow, and Robert Clower, et al. contributed to our understanding of the Liberian nation and people in time and space, especially as they struggle with issues of identity and development in the context of a rapidly changing African and global community? While there are conceivably many issues facing the Liberian studies community, I have chosen to flag seven issues for our collective consideration. They are:

1. Liberia and the UNESCO general history of Africa
2. Legacies of Svend Holsoe and Warren d'Azevedo
3. The gauntlet of Professor Carl Patrick Burrowes
4. Question of independent non-partisan think tanks in Liberia
5. State of Liberian scholarship on Liberian soil
6. Archives and Museums in Liberia and expertise deficit
7. Promise and peril of research and the natural sciences in Liberia.

ISSUE ONE: Liberia and the UNESCO General History of Africa. What transpired, and with what impact on Liberian studies? This UN project was launched in 1964. The challenge was to reconstruct Africa's history, liberating it from racial prejudices resulting from the slave trade and colonization, and "promoting an African perspective" of African history. Now, how did Liberia figure in this effort? Beyond addressing pre-Liberia in the "pre-history of West Africa" and "West Africa Before the 7<sup>th</sup> century," we find in Volume VII, *AFRICA UNDER COLONIAL DOMINATION, 1880–1935* as edited by A.A. Boahen there appears an article entitled "Liberia and Ethiopia, 1880–1914: the survival of two African States," authored by Monday B. Akpan (based on contributions from Abeodu Bowen Jones and R. Pankhurst). In the same volume there is another article entitled "Ethiopia and Liberia, 1914–1935: two independent African states in the colonial era," once again by the same authors earlier cited and the same indication of notes from Jones and Pankhurst. I have had cause to chat with Dr. Jones who narrated to me an experience that was not a happy one. The point here is that in contributing research notes but absent from the deliberations that framed the narrative, Liberia seemed marginalized in this monumental study designed to decolonize the history of all African peoples. Should LSA challenge its members to revisit this experience?

ISSUE TWO: Dual Legacies of Professor Svend Holsoe and Professor Warren d'Azevedo. On the passing of these two distinguished American scholars of the Liberia experience, I had cause to write tributes. For Holsoe I wrote that his many contributions included ethnographic work among the Vai and others including cross-border groups. There is here a significant body of scientific work that awaits vetting, the provision of alternative perspectives by scholars who are themselves associated with the ethnic groups under study. Liberian scholars schooled in the various disciplines are thus being challenged to step up to the plate and deepen our understanding of the country as well in its particularities as in its generalities.

For d'Azevedo I wrote of his pioneering scholarship among the Gola people, a scholarship that he employed to enhance our understanding of the Liberian state. In his series of articles entitled "A Tribal Reaction to Nationalism," he provided ample evidence QUOTE: "that the dynamics of Gola subjugation and eventual co-operative involvement in the emerging of the Liberian nation must be understood not only in terms of specific features of Gola and [colonial] Liberian social

organization, but also in terms of regional historical events prior to colonial occupation and during the struggle on part of the newcomers to establish cultural and political jurisdiction over a portion of the West African coast” UNQUOTE. The inference drawn from the study is that this way of viewing Gola reaction to nationalism in Liberia may well be applicable to other ethnic communities indigenous to the Liberia area, a rare and nuanced understanding of the formation of the mosaic that is the Liberian state.

ISSUE THREE: The gauntlet of Professor Carl Patrick Burrowes. In his engaging and timely study entitled *Between the Kola Forest and the Salty Sea: A History of the Liberian People Before 1800*, Burrowes laments Eurocentrism in Liberian studies. “The writing of Liberian history,” he writes, “has remained stymied in Eurocentrism while an alternative African perspective laid unexplored.” “In Liberian studies,” Burrowes observes, “it continues to be widely assumed that the West and its values are superior, ethnic groups are inherently incompatible, and group identities are unchanging.” He makes the case for a paradigm shift such that Liberian history and culture cease being filtered through the lens of others as he attempts to answer the call of historian Joseph Ki-Zerbo for a new total history, “history apprehended at all levels and in all dimensions and by means of all the tools of investigation available.” Can we demonstrate that Burrowes’ claim is not the case? Can we identify those studies that are in fact Eurocentric?

ISSUE FOUR: Independent non-partisan Think Tank in Liberia, or a case for alternative solutions to problem solving, or building indigenous Liberian research capacity that is sustainable. How much is there in the history of past efforts to guide fresh initiative?

Since my retirement from Sewanee: The University of the South, in 2012, I have spent a good deal of my time in Liberia until recently. During that time, I was engaged as a consultant with a few government reform efforts, including constitutional review and national symbols review. I also partnered with my late friend and colleague, Dr. Byron Tarr and a few other colleagues on the ground in initiating an independent nonpartisan think tank, the Center for Policy Studies/CERPS. We created CERPS because we felt that the ideas that went into public policy-making or governance reform had been generated almost entirely by either the various Liberian governments and/or their foreign partners/donors.

Tarr has left an interesting unpublished study entitled “To Rouse Liberia, Long Forlorn: Overcoming Challenges to Economic Governance.” Here the late Liberian political economist attempts to examine three-dozen Liberian public sector reform projects between 1908 and 2008, all of them with minimal Liberian thinking/input. I understand there are now a number of other fledgling think tanks such as the Center for Liberia’s Future, which are doing some pioneering work on post-Ebola preparedness and the plight of Ebola survivors, orphans, and caregivers.

One thing the two fledging initiatives suggest to my mind is the need for serious independent non-partisan think tanks. Such bodies could offer alternative perspectives on public policy issues and enrich considerably the process of policy making in Liberia.

ISSUE FIVE: State of Liberian scholarship on Liberian soil. Since its incipency, LSA has made efforts to engage Liberian scholars in the country, sponsoring some symposia and hosting the annual conference in Monrovia in 2009. LSA has helped facilitate the work of such Liberia-based publications as the Liberian Research Association Journal, the Cuttington University Research Journal, and the University of Liberia Journal. What has become of all of these efforts? What is the state of scholarship on Liberian soil as we speak? Who is researching what on the ground beyond NGO-sponsored consultancies? What is coming from our university professors and other scholars at home, the earlier work of Dr. Joseph Guannu and a few others, notwithstanding? What is happening to past efforts, including the issue of sustaining journals? With a vibrant Liberian Diaspora community including many in academia, perhaps cooperative research ventures should be explored on both sides of the pond. I must add here my awareness of some research effort at the University of Liberia and individual researchers at other institutions in Liberia, but a culture of research in Liberia awaits cultivation.

ISSUE SIX: Archives and museums in Liberia, expertise and other deficits. I need not recall the importance of these institutions to the life of a people. They speak to matters of historical legacy and heritage: "critical sites of 'social remembering' that help to facilitate the construction of national narratives, preservation of collective memory and production of a national culture." We have had Liberian state papers and related documents since the nineteenth century, but the systematic organization of these documents happened in parallel with the emergence of the Liberian Studies Association in the 1960s as Svend Holsoe and then Dr. Tom Schick played critical roles. For a variety of reasons that systematic organization remains to this day a work in progress with the University of Wisconsin-Madison playing a critical role since 2012. I should also insert here this caveat: the open question of the location and status of the massive documentation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. PAUSE!

There was a bright shining period between 1972 and 1990 when J.H. Deyior Wilson served as Director General of the Center for National Documents and Records Agency (CNDRA). I have vivid recollection of the man and his passion for things archival in Liberia. I last visited with him in Monrovia in May 2000. It was he who led the effort to erect the first purpose-built facility, which today houses CNDRA in Monrovia. And it was he as well who is responsible for the training of at least two professional Liberian archivists who unfortunately are engaged in other endeavors. Sadly, that passion is not in evidence today. Or, the passion has seemingly shifted from Liberian largely to international researchers. I believe that LSA should take an interest in CNDRA and

explore cooperative ventures, for Indiana University Liberian Collections notwithstanding, CNDRA remains a significant repository of Liberian state papers and ancillary materials.

The closely related National Museum has undergone a significant renovation of late. I had the opportunity to visit when in Liberia last month, but the Museum cannot come fully into its own in the absence of a clear national narrative, something likely to emerge from a more fully explored national archives. So, my message here is that LSA might consider becoming a part of the effort to organize and preserve for posterity all of Liberia's written records (in English and those Liberian languages with written scripts). And in furtherance of education of the Liberian people, LSA might also interest itself with the Museum's mission of collecting and displaying items of artistic, cultural and scientific significance to Liberia. But both the Archives and Museum face debilitating expertise deficits, and other challenges. Can LSA help here? Should LSA help? How? Why?

ISSUE SEVEN: Last but by no means the least is the promise and peril in research and the natural sciences in Liberia. I recently held a conversation with two prominent Liberian bio-medical research scientists. The subject was the promise and peril in respect of bio-medical research in Liberia. Prior to the Ebola epidemic, which struck the country in 2014, there was the case of research chimpanzees abandoned on an island in Margibi County where a New York Blood Center had concluded its testing of Hepatitis B and C vaccines. There were Liberian caretakers, no Liberian researchers; perhaps data collectors, no Liberian analysts.

People in a position to know are raising ethics questions, the same nexus between Liberian studies and Liberia's development. What are the perils amidst the promise of the engagements of international research entities without substantive involvement of Liberian peers? During the Ebola epidemic, one Liberian medical scientist seemed sidelined because of his outspokenness at the height of the crisis. Critical thinking in a scientific endeavor was seemingly discouraged. Another Liberian research scientist had the audacity to publish his findings, and was both dismissed as peddling a conspiracy theory and also severely censored. There may be timing and vetting, even research collaboration issues, but not censoring of scientific research such that some are reduced to speaking in muted voices. Is there here a research challenge? I am talking here ethics and research reminiscent of such infamous case as the Tuskegee syphilis experiment of US public health officials. I am definitely not a scientist, but I listen intently when serious people express concern about the integrity of a Liberian content in the agenda of bio-medical research in the country. What is the status today of the Liberian Institute of Bio-medical research? Has it been subsumed under the new National Public Health Institute of Liberia (NPHIL)? Who is researching what,



and to what end? This may all be no more than a hunch, but there is here both promise and peril.

### Some Takeaway from these Remarks:

1. LSA should consider renewing partnership with Liberian research efforts on the ground;
2. There is need for more collaborative research between Liberian and Liberianist scholars, including those in the natural sciences;
3. LSA should consider an intentional program to vet ethnographic and other studies on Liberia;
4. LSA scholars should consider studies that compliment d'Azevedo's monumental "Tribal Reaction to Nationalism" as a way of deepening our understanding of the complex process leading to formation of the Liberian state.

Let me close as I began by again commending the founders and sustainers of LSA for having so well blazed a trail. I commend as well all scholars, international and Liberian, for their various contributions to scholarship on Liberia. Let me again underscore the unique place for Liberians in the study of themselves and their country. Much has been wanting in this critical area for a variety of reasons. A reversal in that trend seems to have begun in earnest, at least since the recent onset of political instability and civil war in Liberia. Check the record with me and you will see increasing activity of Liberian scholars since the 1970s. And this development reminds me of the French Sociologist Raymond Aron's observation that "Troubled times encourage reflection." (*Le temps de trouble incite à la méditation*). More and more Liberians are stepping up to the plate, but not yet enough. The baton is fast passing to a new generation of Liberian scholars happily attuned to the nexus between scholarship and development.

Let me urge you once again, distinguished gentlemen and ladies of LSA, to keep before you this important nexus between scholarship and development. Yes, we must continue to study Liberia in order to advance the frontiers of knowledge, but we must also do so in context of service to the country and its people.

I RENEW MY THANKS FOR YOUR KIND INVITATION AND YOUR KIND ATTENTION.

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# Illustrations



FIGURE 1    Mary A. Mason, my maternal grandmother  
DUNN'S ARCHIVES



FIGURE 2    Thomas A. Mason, my maternal grandfather  
DUNN'S ARCHIVES



FIGURE 3 House where I was born and raised to adolescence  
DUNN'S ARCHIVES



FIGURE 4 Mayetta T. Mason, my mother  
DUNN'S ARCHIVES



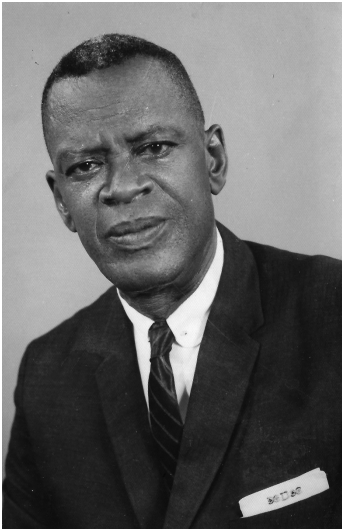


FIGURE 5 Edward L. Dunn, Sr., my father  
DUNN'S ARCHIVES



FIGURE 6 My father as superintendent of Grand Bassa County with President Tubman  
in 1947  
DUNN'S ARCHIVES





FIGURE 7    My father at “Dunn Hill,” fortville, Grand Bassa County  
DUNN ARCHIVES



FIGURE 8    My mother's gravesite on firestone plantation in Margibi County  
DUNN'S ARCHIVES



FIGURE 9 With my childhood neighbor, Madame Neh Wedeh. Photo taken 2016  
DUNN'S ARCHIVES



FIGURE 10 From left, Revs. N.J. Jackson, F.A.K. Russell, and J.T. Weaver: Episcopal clergy at St. John's Episcopal Church in lower b Buchanan in the 1950s  
DUNN'S ARCHIVES



FIGURE 11 With my maternal sisters Lucelia Flood Partridge and Euphemia Flood Cummings  
DUNN'S ARCHIVES



FIGURE 12 My maternal sister Doris A. Elliott  
DUNN'S ARCHIVES



FIGURE 13 My paternal sister Victoria Dunn Tolbert  
DUNN'S ARCHIVES



FIGURE 14 My paternal brother Joseph Edward Dunn  
DUNN'S ARCHIVES





FIGURE 15 With my paternal brother Edward L. Dunn, Jr.  
DUNN'S ARCHIVES



FIGURE 16 Senior class Bassa High School 1960. From left, Wilmot Roberts, Philip Tarr,  
Bertha Walker McBorrough, and me  
DUNN'S ARCHIVES



FIGURE 17 Cuttington College & Divinity School Class of 1964  
DUNN'S ARCHIVES



FIGURE 18 American University graduate school graduation procession, 1972  
DUNN'S ARCHIVES

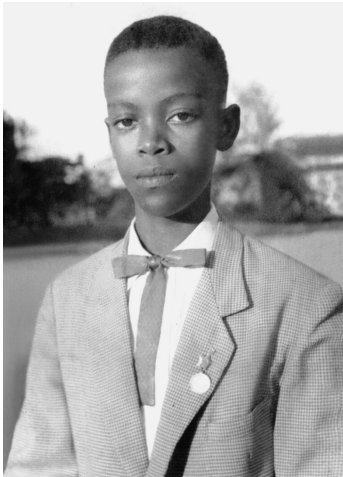


FIGURE 19    Author at age 14  
DUNN'S ARCHIVES



FIGURE 20    Author graduates high school  
DUNN'S ARCHIVES



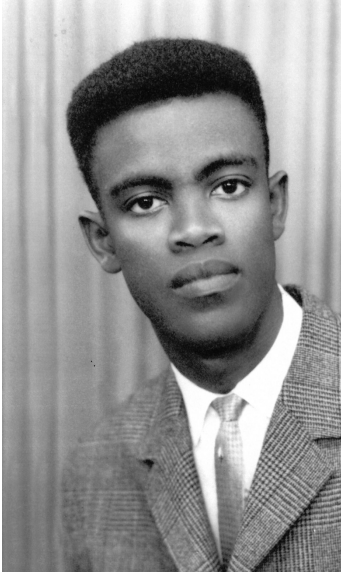


FIGURE 21 Author early 1965  
DUNN'S ARCHIVES



FIGURE 22 Author in France 1965  
DUNN'S ARCHIVES

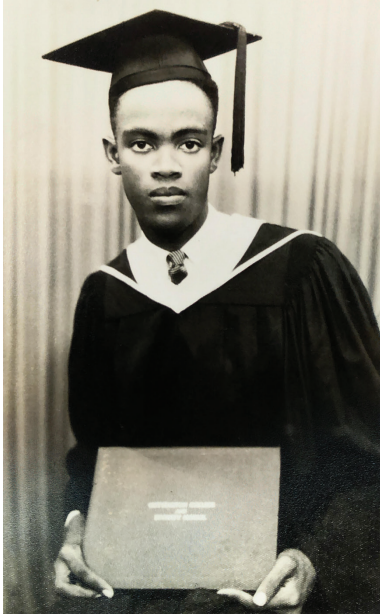


FIGURE 23 Author college graduate  
DUNN'S ARCHIVES

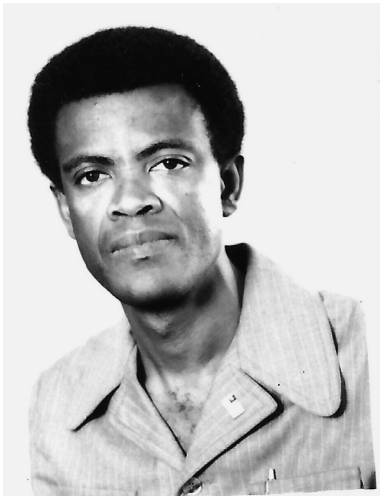


FIGURE 24 Author early 1980s  
DUNN'S ARCHIVES

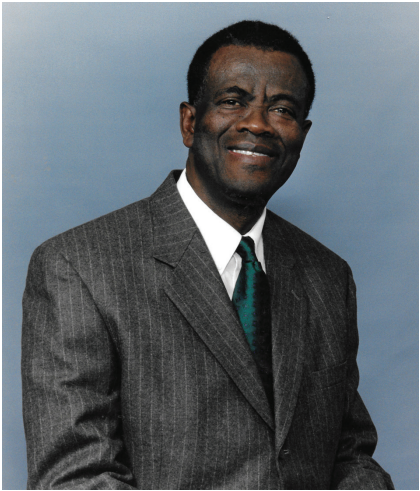


FIGURE 25 Author early 2000s  
DUNN'S ARCHIVES



FIGURE 26 Author with bride Matilda at Altar, 1971  
DUNN'S ARCHIVES



FIGURE 27 Author with bride Matilda at wedding reception, 1971  
DUNN'S ARCHIVES



FIGURE 28 Young couple with first child, Daniel  
DUNN'S ARCHIVES



FIGURE 29 Young couple, 1975  
DUNN'S ARCHIVES

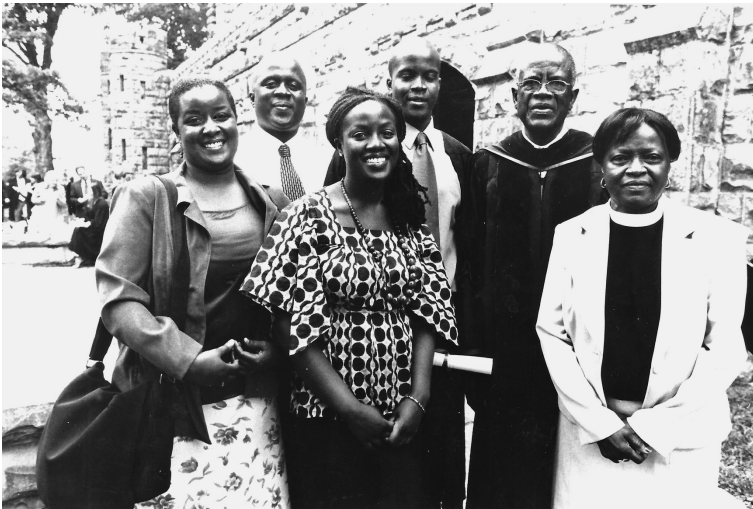


FIGURE 30 Family Portrait with children from left, Dan, Chandra, Sedar, & Germaine in 1990s  
DUNN'S ARCHIVES





FIGURE 31 Family portrait 2011  
DUNN'S ARCHIVES



FIGURE 32 Germaine & Grandson Abram Elwood Dunn  
COURTESY OF GERMAINE DUNN



FIGURE 33 Sedar, wife Ashley, & Grandson Lucas Thomas Dunn  
COURTESY OF SEDAR DUNN



FIGURE 34 Partial staff Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1974. From left, author, Gerald Padmore, Leonard DeShield, Robert Francis Okai, Foreign Minister Dennis, Turner Stewart, Nathaniel Eastman, Charles Ansumana Cooper, John Togba, and Philip Kiadii  
COURTESY GOVERNMENT OF LIBERIA





FIGURE 35 Author being commissioned by Minister Dennis as assistant minister of foreign affairs, 1974  
COURTESY GOVERNMENT OF LIBERIA



FIGURE 36 Author introduces US Ambassador Beverly Carter at YMCA function  
DUNN'S ARCHIVES



FIGURE 37 Matilda and author with Chinese Ambassador to Liberia, 1976  
DUNN'S ARCHIVES



FIGURE 38 Author with Matilda at executive mansion function, 1977  
DUNN'S ARCHIVES



FIGURE 39 Author in Zambia with Minister Dennis and President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia, 1976  
DUNN'S ARCHIVES



FIGURE 40 Author in Algeria with Minister Dennis, President Houari Boumediene, and Algerian interpreter  
DUNN'S ARCHIVES

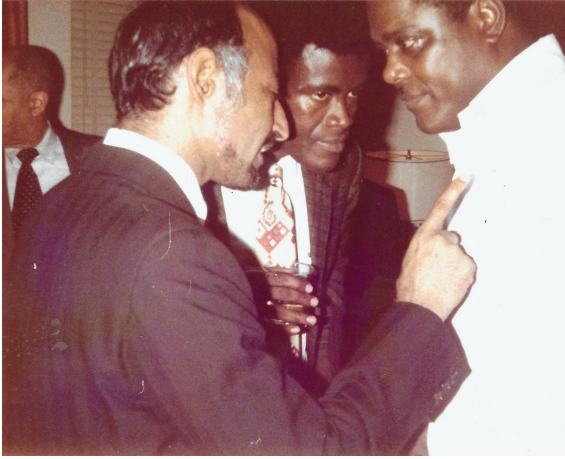


FIGURE 41 Author at UN in New York as French interpreter between Minister Dennis and Foreign Minister Hamdi Ould Mouknass of Mauritania, 1977  
PRESTIGE PRINTS BY BARKAY/DUNN'S ARCHIVES



FIGURE 42 Author commissioned as deputy minister of state by Minister of State Townsend, 1977  
COURTESY GOVERNMENT OF LIBERIA





FIGURE 43 Author commissioned as minister of state and chief of staff to the president, along with Johnny McClain as minister of information, cultural affairs, and tourism, November 1979

COURTESY GOVERNMENT OF LIBERIA



FIGURE 44 Author in congratulatory embrace from President Tolbert, Nov. 1979

COURTESY GOVERNMENT OF LIBERIA



FIGURE 45 Author in a toast with President, Nov. 1979  
COURTESY GOVERNMENT OF LIBERIA

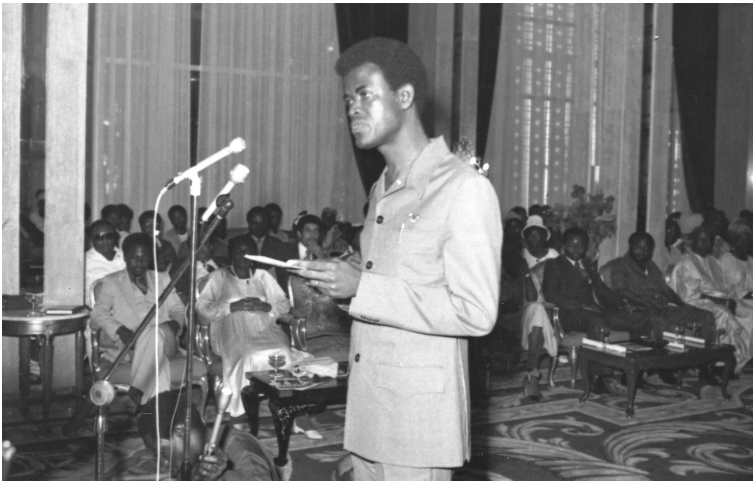


FIGURE 46 Author makes remarks following commissioning, Nov. 1979  
COURTESY GOVERNMENT OF LIBERIA



FIGURE 47 Author among ministers conferred state awards. From left, Commerce Minister John Sherman, the president, Information Minister Johnny McClain, author, Land & Mines Minister Cletus Wortorson, action for Development Minister Luseni Donzo, and National Security Minister Burleigh Holder  
COURTESY GOVERNMENT OF LIBERIA



FIGURE 48 Author poses with President Tolbert in Executive Mansion office  
COURTESY GOVERNMENT OF LIBERIA



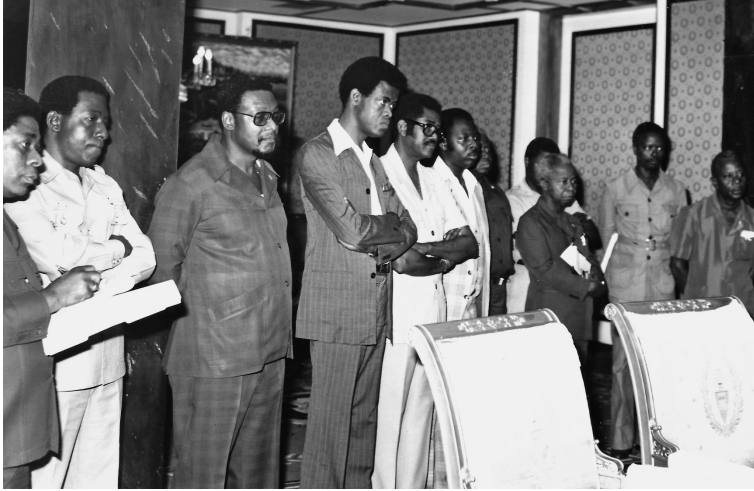


FIGURE 49 Partial Executive Mansion staff. From left, Legal Counsel Nathaniel Marsh, Deputy for Security Wilfred Clarke, author as deputy minister/cabinet, Protocol Officer Henri Dennis, (unidentified person), Minister Townsend, Private Secretary to the President Julius Kromah, and EM Chief of Protocol Charles Hansford. 1978

COURTESY GOVERNMENT OF LIBERIA



FIGURE 50 Author standing with some staff members. From right, Joe Morris, Albert Juste, Marie Leigh Parker, (unidentified person), and Max Dennis. Nov. 1979  
DUNN'S ARCHIVES



FIGURE 51 Partial EM staff. From right, Marie Parker, Albert Juste, author, James Davies, Wilton Sankawulo, and Beverly Thompson Gray  
COURTESY GOVERNMENT OF LIBERIA



FIGURE 52 Author delivering national oration, July 26, 1979. Seated are Vice President Bennie Warner, Matilda behind the VP, and Foreign Minister Dennis and Mrs. Dennis to the far left  
COURTESY GOVERNMENT OF LIBERIA



FIGURE 53 Tolbert in outfit as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces in congratulatory embrace, while Army Chief of Staff Korboy Johnson awaits his turn  
COURTESY GOVERNMENT OF LIBERIA



FIGURE 54 President Tolbert greets Matilda as author shakes hands with Mrs. Henries, July 26, 1979  
COURTESY GOVERNMENT OF LIBERIA



FIGURE 55 Author at executive mansion state dinner seated with Cameroon Ambassador Henry Fossung to left. 1978

COURTESY GOVERNMENT OF LIBERIA



FIGURE 56 President Tolbert's last cabinet. From right, national security burleigh holder, Labor Estrada Bernard, information Jenkins Peal, state for presidential affairs Dunn, Health Kate Bryant, Public Works Gabriel Tucker, Defense James Gbabea, Post & Telecom Trohoe Kpagahai, Finance Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, twp Chairman Townsend, House Speaker Richard Henries, the President, Vice President Bennie Warner, Foreign Minister C. Cecil Dennis, Justice Minister J.J. Chesson, local government minister Edward B. Kesselly, Peter Naigow (acting for Information Minister McClain), Agriculture Minister Cyril Bright, (next three men unidentified), and action for Development Minister Luseni Donzo

COURTESY GOVERNMENT OF LIBERIA





FIGURE 57 Author at work with President Tolbert in his office, late 1979 or early 1980  
COURTESY GOVERNMENT OF LIBERIA

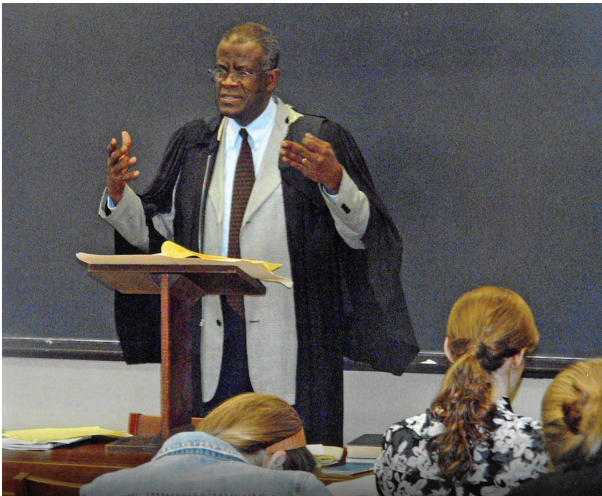


FIGURE 58 Author in class at Sewanee: The University of the South wearing faculty traditional black robe  
DUNN'S ARCHIVES

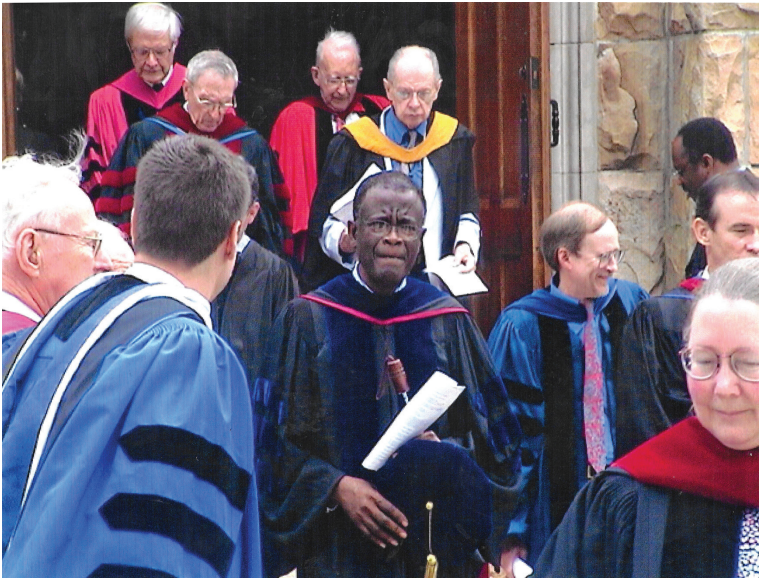


FIGURE 59 Author exiting all saints' chapel from academic recession  
DUNN'S ARCHIVES

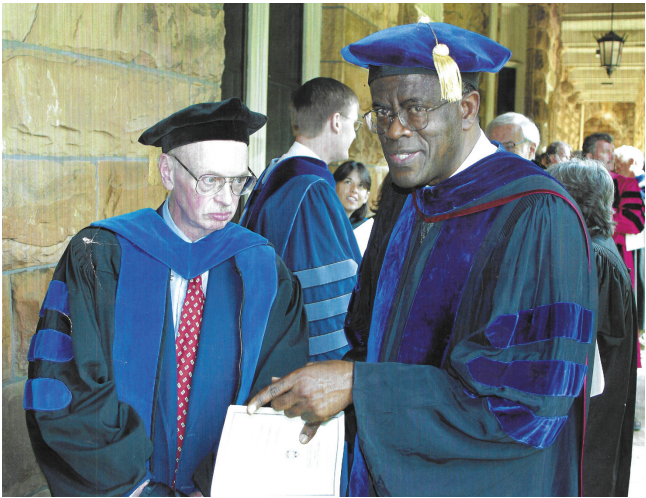


FIGURE 60 Author with philosophy professor colleague Bill Garland  
DUNN'S ARCHIVES



FIGURE 61 Political science faculty at farewell dinner for author, 2012  
DUNN'S ARCHIVES



FIGURE 62 Author with Sewanee Vice Chancellor & President Samuel Williamson, and  
English Professor John Reishman  
DUNN'S ARCHIVES



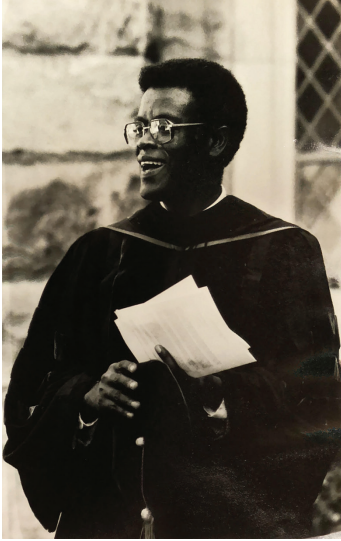


FIGURE 63 Author in early 1980s  
DUNN'S ARCHIVES



FIGURE 64 Author with South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Mrs. Tutu, and a Sewanee official  
DUNN'S ARCHIVES



FIGURE 65 Author and Matilda in Sewanee with prominent african american entrepreneur Earl Graves  
DUNN'S ARCHIVES

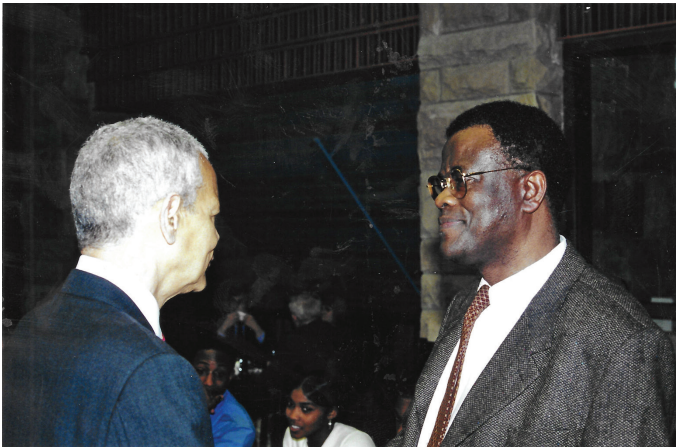


FIGURE 66 Author with american civil rights leader Julian Bond in Sewanee  
DUNN'S ARCHIVES



FIGURE 67 Author seated at left while visiting Nigerian professor monday (Akpan) Abasiatai speaks in Sewanee  
DUNN’S ARCHIVES



FIGURE 68 Author and Matilda with prominent Sewanee citizen Arthur Ben Chitty  
DUNN’S ARCHIVES



FIGURE 69 Author and Matilda in Sewanee  
DUNN'S ARCHIVES



FIGURE 70 Author with Liberian peace & reconciliation technical review meeting  
COURTESY GOVERNMENT OF LIBERIA



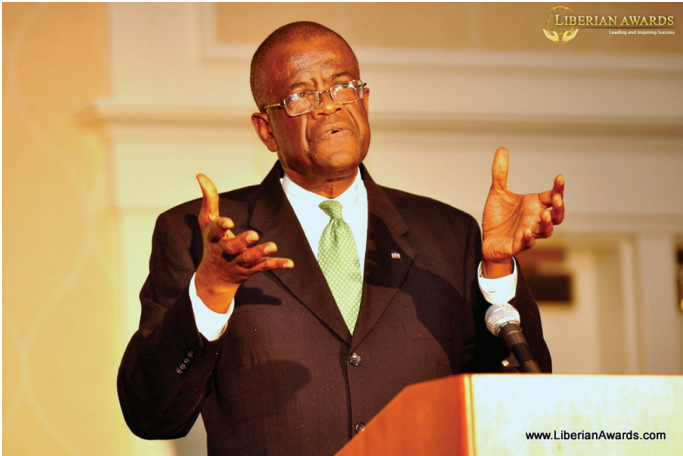


FIGURE 71 Author speaks at Liberian Award event, Philadelphia, 2010  
COURTESY, SAMANTHA DEVINE JALLAH, LIBERIAN AWARDS



FIGURE 72 Author presents email saga report to President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, president's office, Monrovia, 2009  
COURTESY GOVERNMENT OF LIBERIA



FIGURE 73 Author delivers national oration in Monrovia, July 26, 2012  
COURTESY GOVERNMENT OF LIBERIA

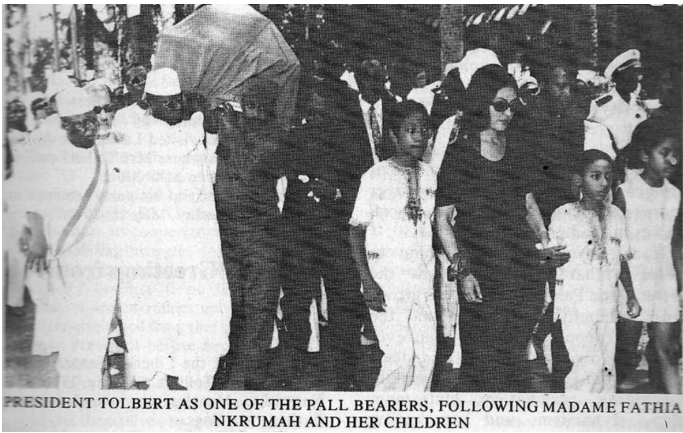


FIGURE 74 President Tolbert as pall bearer with Guinean President Ahmed Sékou Touré at funeral in Conakry, Guinea, of Ghana's founding President Kwame Nkrumah, 1972  
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