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Ethnic stratification in Liberia

Zelma Suzanne (Ife) Williams
Atlanta University

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ETHNIC STRATIFICATION IN LIBERIA

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

BY

ZELMA SUZANNE (IFE) WILLIAMS

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

After American Blacks settled in the African country of Liberia, social distinctions became evident between the new settlers and the indigenous Black population. Even though settlement occurred, Liberia has been viewed as a non-colonial nation primarily because these settlers were of the same basic ancestry as the original inhabitants. But the fact that Blacks settled in Liberia is not a sufficient argument for stating that Liberia is non-colonial. A colonial situation is defined as one in which general authority is determined and exercised by one foreign group in its own interests. This group disregards the well-being and interests of the majority. The ruling group determines what the goals of the entire society will be and works to maintain social, economic and political control so that these objectives will be accomplished.¹ This was also what took place in Liberia.

The Afro-American settlers colonized Liberia in the classical manner. Not only did they cling to their western orientation and values, but they assumed a superior position

in economics and politics over the aborigines. The consequence of both of these acts was for an absence of American Black assimilation and integration into the existing society. Race was not an agent to bind the two groups, but instead served to keep them apart. The western orientation consisted of notions about ethnocentrism and feelings of missionary zeal in order to spread the "superior" culture of the west. Hence, the result was that the indigenous Liberians were not incorporated into the mainstream of the economic sphere. Because of this, ethnic stratification in Liberia emerged. The analyzation of this phenomena is the purpose of this research.

Ethnic stratification is being defined as the division of socio-economically homogenous people. For example, when the American Blacks settled Liberia, they sought freedom according to western ideas of the concept. This led them to seek out certain types of privileges, advantages, benefits and/or opportunities offered by the country. These rights, however, should have been either reserved for the indigenous groups or at least shared with them. Since neither one of these was the result, Blacks in Liberia were divided. The Americans on one side and the Liberians on the other.

Ethnic stratification is rooted in that type of social discrimination which heightens the differences within a group due to bloodline or national origin. It fosters ethnocentrism, which is the belief in the superiority of one's sect over another. The underlying thesis of this study is that ethnic stratification is based in the political-
economy of capitalism, which is the market mechanism for the private ownership of capital and free enterprise. The beliefs, values and ethos that accompany capitalism, known as the capitalist ideology foster social cleavages in order to maximize profits. Therefore, it is my assertion that ethnic stratification is a ramification of the capitalist ideology and serves to stratify a single racial grouping in order that one sector may exploit another.

The historical data available suggests that ethnic stratification in Liberia benefited Black Americans. This is evident in the amassing of funds for the maintenance of the settlement. The subordination of the aborigines through ideological, political and other repressive means led to a securing of a position of domination by the Americo-Liberians. This group has acted as a class, building up the benefits accrued in one generation down to the next and continued to the present generation. The conditions of the aborigines have not only stagnated during this settlement period, but have often retrogressed. Lip service has been given to their aspirations to share in the benefits from the economic order that they are responsible for sustaining.

The American Colonization Society (ACS) has pointed out that the original Afro-Americans to settle Liberia possessed little more than the western values and false myths they held when they reached the African continent.² These

values and myths that had been inculcated in them through the American socialization process formed the basis of the social cleavages that later developed. Michael Wolfers believes that ethnocentric tendencies among American Blacks were often attributed to their general negative perceptions of Africa and its inhabitants. These negative perceptions were promulgated by white Americans for ideological dominance over Black Americans during slavery and afterwards. The intent of the plantation masters, for example, was to convince the slaves that the whites were bring benevolent towards the Black population by removing them from the hostile, primitive environment of Africa. Notions of cannibalism, sacrifices and other torturous activities were believed to be truths by the Blacks, due to their distance from their original habitat. These myths permeated the minds of Blacks, especially since they were dependent on whites for an education.

The realities of American slavery, however, contradicted what the Blacks were being taught. This is supported by the fact that slaves were brought to the United States in chains, which illustrates that there was nothing benevolent about the treatment Blacks received in this country. Black mothers were forced into infanticide to prevent their

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offsprings from such a degrading existence. Many aboli-
tionists sided with the suffering Blacks and called for eman-
cipation, but notions of guilt aside, the oppressors feared living with Blacks as free people. Thus, many organizations, such as the American Colonization Society, were created to re-settle the enslaved Black population elsewhere. By that time, however, Blacks had adopted similar attitudes against other peoples of the world as their oppressors held towards them.

Liberia serves as a model for analyzing this partic-
ular phenomenon. The ideology of capitalism with its under-
lying principles of individualism and liberalism has divided the people of that country and has facilitated the rise and development of Liberia's ethnocentrism. To pit members of a racially homogenous group against one another either blan-
tently or subtly requires deep ideological socialization. The capitalist ideology has enjoyed many successes in this category. Therefore, the significance for analyzing ethnic stratification in Liberia is to show that total liberation from a subordinate position requires one to examine the ideological foundation for both the dominant and submissive groups. It also shows the need for examination of those superficial divisions within the submissive group that re-
lates to the political-economy of capitalism.

The inspiration for this type of inquiry arose from this writer's examination of the Diffusionist Approach to development. This western approach contends that the
diffusion of all visible indicators of development, such as values, technology and skills to a primitive environment, will induce development in that area.\textsuperscript{5} Therefore, the question posed throughout this endeavor is whether Liberia "developed" while accepting and disseminating western values? Or as this author holds, was ethnic stratification the net result of the dissemination of western values?

The methodological approach being utilized in order to make the aforementioned inquiry is a historical analysis of the evolution of the Liberian society. The focus is on indicators of stratification such as the relations between the actors involved, the political and economic apparatuses and finally, the ideological inculcation of stratifying ideas.

Chapter II analyzes the seedings of many contradictions, that are sprouting today, through an examination of the settlement period. Here one can note the importance of the Afro-American's western socialization by the roles they assumed in the colony. The colonists inordinately assumed a superior position over the indigenous population and superimposed their western orientation on that population. The American Colonization Society and the missionaries were also investigated to determine their role in the stratification process.

Chapter III is a chronological overview of the political and economic structures in Liberia from colonial inception to the present. The purpose of such is to note the manner in which the politico-economy was utilized to foster and maintain a stratified society. The policy prior to the 1900s towards the aborigines was "no policy." Although they were symbolically incorporated into the society on paper, there were no significant changes in their socio-economic levels. The Tubman-Tolbert administrations made specific attempts to incorporate the majority but these shifts are directly related to the demands of the economy. Overall, societal integration remained symbolic which is evident in their present standard of living.

The fourth chapter analyzed the schooling processes in Liberia. In Liberia, as in most countries, schooling is deemed as the road to success. One's achievement is determined by the degree to which one is able to imitate their oppressor. Even this being the case, we still find in Liberia barriers in the schooling process to prevent the ascendency of the aborigines. The phenomenon is also attributed the the needs of the economy as opposed to the population; for, Liberia needs a vast pool of unskilled labor for agricultural pursuits.

The conclusion offered is theoretical in nature in order to illucidate on the relationship between ethnic stratification and capitalism. The major contention being that stratification was precipitated by the America-
Liberians for domination over the indigenous population. In reference to the guiding question of development, due to the dissemination of western values, it was found that because of western values the society was stratified. As in the case of economic development, it was also found that Liberia merely experienced growth in a few isolated sectors as opposed to full societal development. Speculatively speaking, if the Afro-Americans had settled Liberia on an equal footing with the existing population, that infusion could have led to a harmoniously, developed society.
CHAPTER 2
THE SETTLEMENT PERIOD

In the latter part of the eighteenth century, debate ensued in the United States on the future status of the slaves. Slavery was no longer perceived by most as a permanent institution, a sentiment probably precipitated by the increasing slave population and internal and external criticisms of slavery. There were two major recourses that could be embarked upon: one was the liberation of the slaves, thus allowing them to live as equals amongst the majority of the population, and the second proposal called for repatriation of the slaves to specified areas of Africa. Many prominent persons in policy making capacities opted for the latter for a number of reasons, a few of which will be cited here. Some slaveholders felt that the liberation of the slaves would threaten their lives due to the cruelties they inflicted upon Blacks under the institution of slavery. In order to psychologically uphold slavery, whites and Blacks had been socialized into accepting the notion of the infericrity of Blacks and thereby not only felt that Blacks could not live harmoniously with whites but also that Blacks needed the paternal guidance of whites in order to survive.

Underlying the aforementioned sentiments was the economic situation. The slaves had served the propose of building
an economic foundation for America. Slavery had been a very profitable institution and had enhanced the livelihoods of a number of persons. Industrialization was beginning in the north and the slave institution had usurped most of the available labor. Because of the wealth and affluence of a segment of the population in the south, slaveholders were beginning to gain international economic prominency. These variables and others served to exacerbate the entire problem of what to do with the Black population.

By the early nineteenth century there were plans made by persons such as Governor James Monroe, for whom Monrovia, the capital of Liberia was named, Thomas Jefferson and other whites and free Blacks to establish Black states. They finally decided that the most likely place to re-settle Blacks was on the west coast of Africa. By 1817 the American Colonization Society (ACS) was organized for the sole purpose of the repatriation of Blacks. Many of the members served in the national political apparatus and were able to persuade Congress to appropriate the initial funds for the first expedition. The objectives of the Friends of Colonization were as follows:

1. To rescue the free coloured people of the United States from the political and social disadvantages.

2. To place them in a country where they may enjoy the benefits of free government with all of the blessings which it brings in its train.

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3. To spread civilization, sound morals, and true religion throughout the continent of Africa.

4. To arrest and destroy the slave trade.

5. To afford slaveowners who wish or are willing to liberate their slaves, an asylum for their reception.\footnote{Calvin Colton, "Colonization and Abolition Contrasted," Pamphlet published in August of 1854, p. 1.}

The reports given on Liberia by the surveyors upon their return to the United States were over exaggerated. The area was described as "uninhabited" with an abundance of land. The early images and perceptions of Liberia in America were ones depicting that area as a land of freedom with plenty of land for all. It was believed to have more opportunities for Blacks than anywhere in the western hemisphere. An example being:

This beauteous domain is in reserve for a people who are to come and cultivate it; and we can see no people as well prepared and adopted for this work as the negroes of the United States.\footnote{"Address of the Honorable John H. B. Gatrobe, President of the ACS," in ACS-Half Century Memorial (Washington: Colonization Society Building, 1968), p. 28.}

The ACS functioned well over fifty years until it began to run out of financial support. In those fifty years the society gave passage to 11,909 persons of colour in over one hundred and forty vessels.\footnote{Ibid.} The activities of the ACS were perceived by the organization as successful. Liberia was designed to be a model in which Blacks could be separated from whites and survive.
In order to induce a clientele to migrate, the society published overexaggerated accounts of Liberia. The American surveyors had managed to swindle the Africans out of a little land with gifts and coercion, not really different from European methods to acquire land during the expansionist period. The whites hired by the society to "aide" the Afro-American were noted in accounts by Black settlers, as being very paternalistic towards the latter grouping.10 This phenomenon is held by some as one of the reasons that the Afro-Americans differentiated themselves from the indigenous population. The society preserved too deep a distinction between those transplanted Blacks that spoke English and the native Blacks who spoke their own language. There were, however, other accounts of the relationship between the society and Afro-Americans that were far from paternal.

Being a coloured man and having keenly felt the persecutions and annoyance to which my race is subject in this country, the result of the base pandering of the dough faces to the inhuman spirit of slavery, which has tied up the ACS, which, on all occasions, becoming and unbecoming, seeks to impress us with the doctrine that although natives of the soil, this is not our home, that our presence here is not agreeable to the whites, nor is our condition advantageous to ourselves; that we are morally, mentally, and physically inferior: an idle worthless and vicious population; nuisances, and that there is no part of the American continent on which we can live, and

On reaching the coast of Liberia, the Afro-Americans realized that they had been misled, the publicized accounts of Liberia were refuted by reality. The land was not conducive to cultivation for varmints and heavy rains frequented the area. The situation seemed hopeless but it was too late, the settlers had to make do or die. As Nesbitt and Williams narrate in an effort to illuminate on the Liberian situation:

Tell all the people you see not to come to torment, before they die, for when they come here, they are coming to torment. More than half that come here die in a short time and all that escape immediate death suffer unspeakable misery all their lives.

When the immigrants first arrived they were housed by the ACS for their first six months in conditions not much better than those on the slave plantation. The buildings in which they were housed were one level and made of bricks in which little stalls were partitioned just large enough for a bed and a few chairs. Each stall opened into a common hall, passing through the center like a barn or stable. There was no regard for the health and comfort of the immigrants. The only ones that were not subjected to this place were those with money and influence.

After the six month period, the housed population were removed to make room for the next group of immigrants.

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11 Ibid., p. 9.
12 Ibid., p. 11
13 Ibid., p. 72.
14 Ibid.
Many of the early settlers did not survive the initial settlement due to the incidence of malaria. After the settlers were thrown off by the ACS, much more despair was experienced. The majority of the settlers were living "in the most abject state of misery and want." The settlers had no other alternative "but to turn in with those who have preceded him, and by hook and by crook, raise a little rum, tobacco and cotton cloth, brass, trinkets, etc., and start on what was called bush trading."\(^{15}\) Many settlers verbalized that they would rather have been in slavery than to remain in that "place of torment."\(^{16}\)

By 1830, the colonists numbered approximately fifteen hundred persons. They had organized themselves into a little aristocracy, apart from the "natives." The only interactions that took place between the two groupings were informal. The indigenous population were customers in shops or laborers on the farms of Americo-Liberians. Some historians held that this was the fault of the ACS and the Afro-Americans for not trying to improve the conditions of the aborigines.\(^{17}\) Again, Nesbitt and Williams sum up these views:

Possibly the society felt that it had enough on its hands in caring for the immigrants without attempting to interfere with the social and political life of the tribes. Its sponsors may have hoped vaguely that the Liberian commonwealth would some day become a

\(^{15}\) Liebenow, Liberia, p. 12.

\(^{16}\) Ibid.

\(^{17}\) Arthur I. Hayman and Harold Preece, Lighting Up Liberia (Creative Age Press, Inc., 1943).
Black democracy of all Black people within its borders.\textsuperscript{18}

The colonists created an aristocracy that survived probably longer than they ever imagined. The Blacks adopted the roles that were assigned to whites in their past situation of slavery. The Americo-Liberians were for the most part very unprincipled in nature, most likely attributable to the influence of whites.\textsuperscript{19} In a letter from Edmond Brown, it was stated that the best man in the colony would perjure himself for five bushels of rice.

There are not two Christians or honest men in all Liberia. Some of the constables cannot read their names in print, and it is hard work for some lawyers to write their names. They are the meanest people that ever breathed.\textsuperscript{20}

Regardless of the socio-economic status of the settlers they viewed themselves as being in a higher position than the indigenous population. Among the poor, there was not one without some kind of handle affixed to his name. Everyone was a Colonel, General, Major, Captain, Judge, Esquire, etc. Nesbitt and Williams referred to this cadre as a sort of a cod-fish aristocracy.\textsuperscript{21}

The Americo-Liberian settlers were not welcomed with open arms. Through coercion, the Honorable Bushrod Washington, a caucasian that served as the first president of

\textsuperscript{18}Nesbitt and Williams, Two Black Views, pp. 47-48.
\textsuperscript{19}Hayman and Preece, Lighting Up Liberia, p. 125
\textsuperscript{20}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{21}Ibid., p. 15.
Liberia, acquired more land for the group. However, throughout Liberia's early history there are recorded instances of attacks by the indigenous population on the settlers. The only thing that kept the aborigines from pushing the settlers into the sea was the advanced military artillery in the hands of the settlers. Some of the early Christianized writers maintain that the settlers were "saved by the want of discipline of the assailants." The settlers' perception of the indigenous population was not complimentary, as can be noted in the following account:

(The aborigines) ... are well formed, of black color, medium size, and tolerably regular features, very lazy, rude and ignorant, filthy and disgusting in their habits; have their own laws and kings, totally the pusillanimous pretensions of the Colonial Government, which they consider a usurpation which they will rid themselves of some day. The mass of them do not wear any clothes at all, but appear in all the pride and beauty of nature, unadorned.

They are polygamist to the greatest extent, and have as many wives as they are able to buy; and as all their wealth is invested in women, of course he that has the most wives is the greatest man.

These negative accounts are somewhat analogous to those perceptions of Blacks by whites. One settler did concede that the aborigines were very happy which could be justified through the old adage, "ignorance is bliss." The indigenous population spent a large portion of their time in "frolic

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22 Ibid., pp. 47-48.

and rivalry, singing and dancing."24 In this same account, they were also noted as being very hospitable to visitors who they presented with gifts and expected gifts in return. Due to the differences in value systems, exchanges were bound to be unequal, which led Nesbitt to conclude that they were unfair in their dealings; yet, he added that "they (were) worsted by the superior knavery of the colonists."25

In a report on the activity of the colony by the ACS, it was stated that the colonists were "spreading the blessings of civilization, morals and religion among the natives."26 The impact on the aborigines was so profound until they were said to have abandoned their previous subversive activity, such as burning the towns. In actuality, they were probably acquiescing to the dominant force in order to survive. Also in this report, the implication was made that the colonists had taught the aborigines about "cultivation of the soil," yet, it must be held in mind that life did begin prior to "western discovery," for the aborigines had been surviving on the land long before the colonists arrived. The implication can be made that there was an exchange of methods and techniques between the two groupings. Many colonists had a disdain for agriculture which they associated with slavery; thereby putting themselves in a situation of dependency on

24Nesbitt and Williams, Two Black Views, pp. 56-57.
25Ibid.
the aborigines for foodstuffs.

Curiously, the most successful farmers of all stood at the bottom of the Americo-Liberian social structure. These were the Congo, Dahomean and Ibo captives who had been taken from slaving vessels and deposited at Monrovia. The captive Africans lacked Western education, were unable to speak either English or the local tribal languages, had been stripped of all their property and family ties, and were entirely dependent upon the mercy of the white agents and the Americo-Liberian settlers. Collectively they were referred to as Congoes, a term still current in Liberia.  

The positive reports on the settlement by the ACS in residence were of course believed by the home base of the organization. At their Half-Century Memorial meeting the President of the society stated that the colonists had "brought within its elevating influence at least 200,000 of the native inhabitants."  

It was believed that this influence was advantageous to the latter for he further stated that the natives were gradually acquiring the benefits of western civilization.  

The aborigines that were incorporated into the colony did not feel the benefits of civilization as much as they felt the negative connotations of it. The aborigines were incorporated through purchase or coercion. The price varied between eight to fifteen dollars. The purchased beings, mostly children, were thought by exterior forces to have been adopted by the colonists. Indeed some were adopted and their

28 ACS Half-Century Memorial, p. 34.
29 Ibid.
status was comparable to that of the house slaves in the United States. The most obedient "ward," as they were called, received some education and the names of their oppressors. This system was legally recognized in 1838. It entailed the trading of food, clothing, shelter and sometimes education for a child of "tribal" origin. The ward was at first a type of indentured servant, after the system was informally institutionalized the wards became slaves. The process of incorporating youths into the family could be symbolic of an early form of assimilation, but the way in which they were included clearly shows that they were not meant to be equal.

The "slaves-slaves," as they could be termed, performed all the labor. Regardless of the financial status of the colonists, they somehow managed to acquire slaves. One account referred to a very poor settler who was insufficiently clothed and housed yet still kept slaves about him. Most colonists had from one to fifteen slaves, according to their circumstances.

The colonists not only internalized the dominant position of their former slave owners, but exaggerated it. The Black master was believed to have been more severe than the white "masters" of the United States. The slaves were housed in a small dwelling near their master, in what was known as

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30 Nesbitt and Williams, Two Black Views, p. 15.
31 Liebenow, Liberia, p. 16.
32 Nesbitt and Williams, Two Black Views, p. 15.
"negro-quarters." It must be noted that the masters also lived in insufficient dwellings, their huts were usually made of bamboo that could hardly protect them from the weather and varmints. Needless to mention, the slaves were not well taken care of; for, in most accounts they were usually referred to as being naked. They were mal-nourished, being sustained on rations of rice and cassava, if they wanted more food they were forced to steal. As for meat, the slaves had to be content with "a monkey, a snake, a crocodile, lizard, rat or something of this kind which they often (did) and devour it with a gusto that would astonish and disgust the poorest fed slaves in the United States." 

It would not be speculative if one concluded that the aborigines were prey to barbaric cruelties inflicted upon them by the Black settlers. Not all of the Black colonists had slaves; there was a very minute percentage of settlers who were not slave holders and were humane in their dealings with all groups in the society.

The most appropriate question to raise at this point would be that if over 10,000 of the settlers were refugees of the slave system in the United States, thereby feeling the pain of such an arrangement, why would they inflict such torture on others? Nesbitt and Williams replied that the colonists were entrapped in a "hell on earth," their only

33 Ibid., p. 39

34 Ibid.
recourse was to make the "best" of a negative situation. They further stated that the Black settlers, while in slavery, perceived the position of their masters as being "supremely happy" and undertook the same means to procure their happiness. This was done through the acquisition of slaves, rum, tobacco and a few trinkets which transformed them into tyrants.37

A more theoretical view presented on this topic was offered by Frantz Fanon in his work, Toward the African Revolution, in speaking of the oppressed in general, Fanon states:

Because no other solution is left it, the racialized group tries to imitate the oppressor and thereby to deracialize itself. The 'inferior race' denies itself as a different race. It shares with the 'superior race' the convictions, doctrines and other attitudes concerning it.

The inferiorized group had admitted, since the force of reasoning was implacable, that its misfortunes resulted directly from its racial and cultural characteristics.

Guilt and inferiority are the usual consequences of this dialectic. The oppressed then tries to escape on the one hand by proclaiming his total and unconditional adoption of the new cultural models, and on the other, by pronouncing an irreversible condemnation of his own cultural style.38

Michael Wolfers, continuing along the same line as Fanon states that the measure of African achievement has been taken from the degree to which he successfully imitates the European. He adds that the sufficiency of adopting

37 Ibid., p. 38

the customs of the European is not enough; for, the tendency of the oppressed is to impose them on others, either by example or in some instances by compulsion. 39

Missionaries in Liberia

Although neither the ACS or the colonists had formal obligations to perpetuate the development of the human forces in the interior, through civilizing them, the missionaries did. Therefore, a citation should be made of the actual activities of some of the missions in Liberia.

The caucasian denominations in the United States held a racist perception of Africa and Blacks. The slave system was based on the view of inferiority of the Blacks, a belief that was perpetuated and reinforced in the churches. The dominant view was the superiority of the whites which few questioned, including the church. Some missions felt that the aborigines would be responsive to their efforts to the point of welcoming them. Some authors depicted the indigenous population as longing to be civilized, as if they thought they were uncivilized. The missions justified this position in that they were allowed to establish themselves almost anywhere, with or without the consent of the original Liberians.

During the settlement period a number of churches, including Black congregations, funded a number of persons to proselytize the indigenous population. On the surface

their mission was to promote civilization through Christianity, but in practice they repressed the indigenous population. Their mission, if handled according to the basic doctrines of their professed religion, could have stimulated a common means of relations between the two groups, even if it meant ideological subordination of both groupings. Yet the efforts of the missionaries seemed to have further stratified the society.  

The relationship between the Blacks and the missionaries in general was paternalistic. Blacks were perceived of as children not yet trained, to be tolerated and not dealt with on an equal basis. A case in point would be the reception by the priests of the first Black man consecrated as a Bishop from 1884-1916. Bishop Ferguson had been depicted as a very capable and "an exceedingly gifted man." His major objective was to affirm the competence of the Black race. Upon consecration, Bishop Ferguson was automatically denounced by his peers. The Reverend Mr. Hope, "damneć the Liberians" and Mr. Ferguson within the first fourteen days of his stay. Another priest separated himself from "Ferguson's oversight and went about things in his own way." In the thirty-two years of Bishop Ferguson's episcopate only four whites were appointed to Liberia. This was a drastic decrease in the number of Episcopalaean missionaries.  

41 Dean A. Holt, "Episcopal Mission Work in Liberia:
Dean A. Holt contends that the missionaries were adversaries of the colonists. Although the colonists were to work with the missionaries, the latter found themselves operating in a vacuum. The antagonistic relationship between the settlers and the missionaries was precipitated because the missions' aim was to help the people that the colonists did not want to be helped. The "immigrants and the indigenous peoples saw one another as adversaries and the colonists had no intention of seeing to it that virtues gained advantages." 42

The inability of the missions to penetrate the interior could be attributable to a number of variables, one of which is geography, since the missionaries had no idea of the construction of the interior. Another theory is that lack of resources and the inner need for self survival also prevented the movement to the interior; for Liberia was not the most conducive setting for survival. Holt probably comes closest in explaining the lack of penetration by stating that it was against the elitist interests of the settlers. 43 An honest full fledged effort by the missionaries to neutralize cultural differences could have resulted in a harmonious relationship between the aborigines and the settlers.


42 Ibid., p. 6.
43 Ibid., p. 3.
In a letter from M. R. Delaney, an early settler, there was posited a negative view of the missions' activities. The position of this particular settler was that the missionaries propounded ideas of the superiority of the whites. They further implied that they were "God-gifted" and that therefore all great and good things are inherent in whites. Delaney concluded that the presence of the missions had an injurious affect "upon the natives" as their activities were depicted as being hypocritical.44

In the quest for survival, some of the missionaries turned traders. A few missionaries were wealthy and had "tolerable establishments" but the majority of them dealt in small affairs. The merchant missionaries performed a type of barter with the aborigines. They dispensed rum, tobacco, cotton, trinkets and firearms at enormous levels for palm oil, cain wood, etc., which were in turn traded to the merchant vessels. Apparently, the missionaries not only acknowledged "slave holding as a bible institution" but also had slaves.45

In the accounts by the settlers, the conclusion was made that the missionaries "contaminated the natives and sunk them still lower." The missions misled the aborigines and were very sinful in their activities; thereby making little "progress" in civilizing and Christianizing the interior

44Nesbitt and Williams, Two Black Views, pp. 6-7.
population. "Any other missionaries there who (were) doing any good at all (had) their labors directed exclusively amongst the colonists, not deigning to hold religious conversations with the natives."\textsuperscript{46}

On the basis of reports on early settlement activity in Liberia it is possible to draw a line between the ideal model posited by the ACS and its implementation, as contrasted to the reality of the early relations between the aborigines, settlers and the missionaries. The conclusion that can be drawn is that the ACS and the missions contributed to the stratification process in Liberia by functioning like cogs in the developing capitalist system. One cannot discover any instances in which the missions and the ACS attempted to impede that phenomenon. It may be going too far to say that they participated in the same dealings as the Americo-Liberians; yet, to condemn the ACS or any other external forces for not attempting to arrest the stratification process is to avoid the issue. One must question the reality of expecting colonization to take place without some type of cleavages precipitating between the actors involved. One must also examine the intentions and mental state of the Americo-Liberians who strove for symbolic freedom by adopting and exaggerating western values, by assuming the role of masters over their distant brethren.

The old liberal notion of unimpeded migration would have full warrant if such migration could proceed without trailing clouds of privilege in its train.

\textsuperscript{46}Ibid.
But in practice it cannot. Immigrants to the tropics and sub-tropics seldom stand on a footing of civic, political and economic equality with the citizens of the land they go to; they either rise to overlordship or sink to serfdom.47

CHAPTER 3
THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF LIBERIA

In the preceding chapter the roles of the American Colonization Society, the missionaries and the settlers in the formulation of a stratified society was discussed. The intent of this chapter however, is to analyze the formal channels through which ethnic stratification was institutionalized, beginning with the settlement period. The framework for the precipitating phenomenon was the capitalist system and its trailing requirements. Through utilization of the political, economic, ideological, and repressive apparatuses of the capitalist system, the oppression of the indigenous population was founded and maintained. The Americo-Liberians managed to strengthen and maintain their elite stature in the economic and political spheres through the denial of rights and privileges to the aborigines. The reaction of the latter and the part played by the United States is also examined in order to note the dialectical nature of this phenomenon.

The roots of Liberia's ethnic stratification, as mentioned, are in its early settlement period. During that time, the type of political organization exercised was
democratic. The American Colonization Society con-
trolled the political apparatus thereby giving themselves
the right to make rules for the government of the settle-
ment through the drafting and approval of the 1825 con-
stitution. The government made sure that the colonizers
would stay in Liberia in the designation of a statute which:

...(forbade) all captains, owners, and agents of
vessels from taking away any individual out of
the Republic under the penalty of five hundred
dollars, without a passport obtained from the
secretary of state.49

In addition, Nesbitt and Williams note:

They (have) also (had) laws allowing for imprison-
ment for debt and the public sale of a debtor to
the highest bidder, to work out the amount of his
indebtedness...A colonist named Armstrong, who is
himself a slave-holder, was sold for debt at
Monrovia...And there is nothing more common than
to punish offenders at the public whipping post,
and in that way wipe out their crimes, in fact
that is the only mode of punishment at all prac-
tical as there is but one jail in this country
(that at Monrovia). 50

There was also a digest of laws that declared such things
as quarreling, revolting, Sabbath-breaking, etc., infrac-
tions of the public peace. 51

48 Leslie Buell, The Native Problem In Africa, Vol II,

49 Nesbitt and Williams, Two Black Views, p. 29

50 Ibid., p. 32.

51 Buell, Native Problem, p. 706.
Before Liberia could be recognized as a state, the ACS had to abolish all political connections with Liberia, it did so in 1846. On July 29, 1847, the Liberians held a convention to draw up a Declaration of Independence and a Constitution. Liberia was not recognized as a state by the United States until 1862, whereas Britain and France recognized Liberia almost immediately after settlement.\(^{52}\)

At the time of Liberia's independence, Liberia was experiencing prosperity in commerce and agriculture. The hegemonic elements in commerce were primarily the light-skinned Blacks and Mulattoes. This force which was led by Joseph J. Roberts, the first President after independence, reflected the behavior, attitudes and sentiments of western civilization. In the early days, and even today, there existed a type of "caste" system based on pigmentation. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, there was a power shift from the Mulattoes to the darker elements within the American elite group. This, however, did not contribute to an improvement of the status of the original Liberians.\(^{53}\)

The role of the Liberian merchants is crucial to the discussion of the origins of privilege in the political-

\(^{52}\)Ibid., p. 708.

\(^{53}\)Lowenkopf, Politics, p. 21
economy. This class represented the most prominent citizenry in early Liberia primarily because of their wealth. Economic prosperity was experienced in commerce; for, the colonists were dependent upon the imported commodities that were exchangeable for African goods.  

The reason why the settlers were dependent on the merchants was that their prejudices towards the African extended to diet. The settlers did not want to consume native cuisine, although they often had to, spent their income on imported foodstuffs.

The Liberian merchant was usually of a freeborn status and had some degree of literacy prior to emigration. The merchants gained access to the political apparatus because of their economic status. There was a twenty five dollar fee levied for the franchise and a two hundred and fifty dollar fee to hold the major political offices. Since the merchants were practically the only ones capable of paying such exorbitant rates for political participation their status was enhanced; for, they were able to enact

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legislation advantageous to themselves. Through the inter-
relationship of the political and economic apparatuses, the
merchants became the early privileged citizens over the other
settlers.

The role of the family was also basic to Liberia's
political structure. The finance of the regimes weighed
heavily on the families and the missionaries. The
characteristics of familial ties are "sequential monogamy"
and bilateralism, counting kinsmen in both the male and
female lines. Through birth and marriage one gained entry
into a corporate grouping; for ones entry into the political
and economic arenas was dependent on their respective
familial connections. Divorce was used as a weapon of
group conflict to break ties with certain families.58 This
informal political structure served to maintain the suprem-
acy of the Americo-Liberians over the indigenous population.
Rarely are "naturalized Liberians...Gola, Grebo and others
who have undergone a measure of acculturation" been allowed
entry into the political apparatus.

The one American institution modified in the
Atlantic crossing was the family. The extra-
ordinary emphasis that the Americo-Liberian
settlers placed upon family ties was undoubtedly
a reaction against the cruel and recurrent dis-
ruption of the slave family and the status of
illegitimacy for the products of mixed unions.59

58 Liebenow, Liberia, pp. 136-137.
59 Ibid., pp. 15-16.
By the end of the nineteenth century, Liberia was losing her high financial status. Agricultural competition with other peripheral countries had a negative effect on Liberia for agriculture is where most of the revenue is extracted. Previously, the European countries served as a market for Liberia's coffee and sugar cane, but coffee from Brazil cut that trade in half. Also sugar cultivation in Europe decreased Liberia's sugar exports. By 1871, Liberia was virtually bankrupt and in 1912 sought and subsequently defaulted on loans from Britain and other international funds. The money was mishandled and the Liberians accrued very little benefits.\(^{60}\) During this time, the settler government was acquiring more of the hinterlands through a series of treaties and repressive occupation. The 1847 constitution had made no provisions for the governing of the hinterland, and there were not enough funds to police the area and monitor relations amongst the aborigines. There was a notion that the hinterland population would gradually be annexed; however, no specific measures were undertaken to provide them with rights as citizens. Due to these internal problems:

...the ruling class of Liberia understood that it was only a matter of time before their debts and (aborigine) problems would force them to accept external control. They preferred that to

be American control. 61

The American government had not supported Liberia since 1886, when they depended on funds from the ACS, as a result, it was felt that Liberia had lost three-fourths of its territory through annexation by Britain and France. In 1906, Liberia made an appeal to the United States for aid, "The U.S. response to the 1906 request was that 'such assistance and support (would) be consistent with the friendly interest of the United States (and) the integrity of Liberia." 62 There was a great deal of debate in the American legislature as to whether to grant aid to Liberia, but the overall consensus was that the U.S. had a moral obligation to the area. This writer contends that the moral sentiment was merely a guise to secure a foothold in the country for later exploitation.

In 1908, fiscal problems and the threat to the public peace posed by the people in the hinterland, pushed the Americo-Liberians into making an appeal to the U.S. to grant the colony protectorate status. Larry R. Brim holds that the American obligation seemed to have stemmed from the debt owed to the "victims of the slave trade,


62 Ibid., pp. 4-5.
because failure of Liberia in self-government would be "discouraging to Black people and American prestige was at stake."63

In 1909, the U.S. sent in a Commission to investigate Liberia's "default on European loans which British and French appeared ready to use as an excuse to take over the country."64 Also during that year the Grebo people refused to pay the hut tax. The rebellions that ensued were blown out of proportion in reports sent to the United States in order to induce the U.S. to give military support to suppress them. Through such over-exaggeration, Liberia achieved that goal; the aid given to Liberia was for the defense of the Americo-Liberians. In addition to the aid, in 1910, they also requested:

...guarantee of independence, territorial integrity, American control of customs, an American bank, American capital for internal public improvements, an American agricultural research station, American command, supervision and organization of the Liberian military forces; industrial schools, and a periodic (annual) visit of an American warship, (presumably for both domestic and foreign assurances).65

According to Secretary of State Knox, the American program did not provide for such essentials as roads simply because such a development of the hinterland would have constituted

63Ibid.
64Lowenkopf, Politics in Liberia, p. 38.
a serious threat to the hegemony of the Americo-Liberians.66 As a result, America did not embark on a plan for nurturing the Liberian national communities' will-to-growth, but rather affirmed a "'friendly adviser' role—a euphemism for playing big brother in Liberian affairs."

In 1912, America and the Americo-Liberians finally made an agreement that provided for American advisors and aid in important government departments concerning debts, order, health, customs and revenues in general. A loan of $1.7 million was made to pay off a 1906 British debt and to pay off another British loan that was originally made in the 1870s. The public debt was refunded directly by a group of New York bankers, including Rockefeller interests. The customs revenues, import and export revenues and rubber tax revenues were pledged as security.67

In 1915, the public debt of Liberia increased to $2.5 million. Trade was almost non-existent and the U.S. was not responding to appeals for food and trade. That same year the Kru people decided to rebel against the hut tax. This rebellion was perceived by the U.S. as a threat to democracy. Their response was to send in a war vessel, the USS Chester, to prevent European intervention and to

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66 Secretary of State Knox to the German Ambassador, June 29, 1911, in Brim, "The Eagle," p. 11.

67 These are wartime reports from the Chicago Defender, March 17, 1923, p. 3.
transport troops and arms to the Sinoe coast. 68

The Liberian economy was virtually destroyed by the war; however, the government decided to enter the war on the side of the U.S. Liberia offered labour, a naval station and natural resources to the Allies in hopes of gaining American aid after the war. The U.S. provided a $5 million credit in the treasury department under a wartime provision. After the war, the treasury department declared the loan illegal since it only covered times of war. In September of 1922, the Senate killed the Liberian loan, while the price of rubber skyrocketed.

During the 1920s, Liberia had been negotiating for financial help from other sources, and in 1926 she signed three agreements with American rubber interests represented by Harvey S. Firestone. The first concern was the construction of a deep-water harbour at Monrovia—a plan later abandoned. The second provided for a loan from the Finance Corporation of America—a Firestone subsidiary. The third granted the company the right to lease up to one million acres of land in Liberia at an annual rental of 6 cents an acre for a term of 99 years. The company was to pay a tax of 1 per cent on the gross value of all rubber exported; it was not required to pay income tax. The agreement saved the country from bankruptcy, but for the next decade did little to effect is economic recovery. Rubber trees take seven years to mature: the first rubber was not tapped until the early 1930s, by which time the price of rubber had fallen drastically as a result of the Depression. Planting operations were also slowed down and much smaller acreages leased and planted than originally intended.

although by 1940, 40,000 acres were in production. Firestone's financial contribution to the republic during the period was small in relation to what had been expected: President Edwin Barclay estimated that in 1938, it amounted to less than 3 per cent of government revenues.\(^6\)

That claim by President Barclay was later refuted by Firestone. The Firestone agreement made a mere dent in the employment conditions for labour for the rubber plantations is seasonal.

During all of this time mounting resentment was felt by the indigenous population, for the colony had not extended privileges to, nor had it made significant improvement in their lives. They rebelled against the regime by refusing to pay the hut taxes, yet this type of activity was met with repressive measures. The aborigines had just cause to revolt for very little benefits had been extended to the hinterland by the settlement. The few schools and hospitals that existed were provided for by themselves and some missionaries.

In the 1920s there were reports to the United States of forced labour tantamount to slavery. The League of Nations sent out a Commission in the 1930s to investigate the matter. Their report held that slavery did not exist, "although domestic slavery existed among the tribes and leading citizens were accepting aboriginals as pawns...i.e."

\(^6\)Fraenkel, Tribe and Class, p. 23.
the system whereby a relative or other dependent might be offered as security for a loan or debt. After publication of the report domestic servitude including 'pawning' was immediately declared illegal."70

President Arthur Barclay (1904-12), extended the Council system of indirect rule to the hinterland due to increasing internal and external pressures. To extend the authority, the Liberian Frontier Force (LFF) was established in 1908 under British direction. Because of its limited size however, this force only managed to police a few areas at a time.

Resentment lingered in the hinterland which resulted in the "Kru revolt in 1915 and the Gola war in 1918 (which) represented the last violent efforts of the Tribal people to throw off the central government..."71 There were a number of things that gave rise to the outbreaks, the most severe of which was the increase in tax regulations to make up the revenue that had been lost due to cutbacks in trade with Europe. Though a number of sources attribute the revolt to the absence of rum in the hinterland, it seems more likely that the Kru and Gola revolted out of concern for economic and political power and resentment over the erosion of tribal authority.

70 Ibid., p. 25.
71 Lowenkopf, Politics in Liberia, p. 34
During the administration of President Charles D. B. King (1920-1930), tribal authority was further eroded. King's regime was characterized by increased suppression of 'tribal' traditions and organizations, which is believed to have been a reaction to the uprisings. There were a number of ill-equipped, untrained, Commissioners dispersed in the hinterland to administer the territories like 'despots.' These Commissioners were sent out to protect the hinterland population from abuse and exploitation. In this task they failed. This system was arrested and transformed back into direct rule under President Edwin Barclay (1930-1944); thereby, making the environment somewhat peaceful.

In 1934, the total population of Liberia was 10,000 persons and by the second World War, it was 12,000. Monrovia was poverty stricken thereby being unable to relish the technological advances of the capitalist sphere. There was no electricity, telephones, sanitation, or paved streets, but commercial trade was increasing with Lebanon and Europe.72

The role of the family in politics has already been mentioned, but the reign of familial rule was ended to some degree after the King-Barclay administrations, (1920-1944). The successor, President Tubman, concerned himself with loyalty to his regime. This may have been due to the

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72 Fraenkel, Tribe and Class, p. 27.
increasing activities of opposition parties which were silenced directly or indirectly. Tubman's regime is characterized by increased patronage to ensure loyalty. "Only persons of known participation in social, church and party activities were trusted enough to be allowed to move up the political ladder."\textsuperscript{73}

The importance of this regime is that it managed to symbolically incorporate the indigenous population into the True Whig Party. Obviously this was symbolic to ensure support for Tubman; yet, the representatives of the hinterland were not "allowed to develop popular mass support from their local areas for seats in the legislature." Therefore, the envisaged hope of the interior population to gain political power was short lived; for they had little or no say in policy making. Under Liberia's political system the President maintains the last word.

There was severe opposition to Tubman by the ruling elite families. The families were appalled by the extension of political rights to the hinterland and feared their end. The struggle between the elite families to remove Tubman and his efforts to maintain his position was violent, which ensued an assassination attempt on his life by a hired assassin. The failure of the families to remove Tubman is

believed to have led to their downfall. This was an ideological victory for Tubman and the indigenous population for thereafter familial control took a back seat.74

In 1964, through legislative proceedings, the last symbolic barrier to full political participation was removed with the "Unification and Integration Policy," the system of "indirect rule" was also terminated. In the economy, the "Open Door" policies were enacted that provided an environment for unlimited foreign investments. The effects of these policies were phenomenal, Liberian economic growth after 1950 became second only to that of Japan. The increased external investments were the major weapons used against the old ruling elite that had maintained their political power by financing the regime. It was believed that the new industries would provide new socio-economic alternatives for the hinterland through the establishment of roads, schools, hospitals and other infrastructures. "Prior to 1944, no public roads were available northwest of Careysburg (about 27 miles from Monrovia) to the hinterland; by 1949, there were 220 miles of road throughout Liberia, which was further expanded to 900 miles in 1969."75 The majority of the roads lead to the periphery of Liberia for the extraction of raw materials.

74 Ibid., p. 11.
It is important to note the impact of growing nationalism throughout Africa during this era. Liberia's neighbors, Ghana, Guinea, and Nigeria gained independence from 1957-1960. African nationalism revealed the contradictory status of the Liberian elite; therefore, more symbolic moves were made to lessen the oppression of the indigenous population. Tubman supported African nationalism which merely underlined the ambiguous nature of his regime; such contradictions were addressed by students and the dissenting population.

Dr. William R. Tolbert Jr. received the Presidency by default on the death of Tubman. Tolbert tried to rechannel the discontent by denouncing the Tubman regime. For a short while Tolbert managed to use the overall discontent for support, but it was not long before the populus saw through his facade. The administration's promises were 'superficial' for he was committed to maintaining the system Tubman had entrenched. The arena for Tolbert's expose were the institutions of higher learning.

In July of 1972, Dr. Edward Kesselly stated, "... in the spirit of the time, our present motto, "The Love of Liberty Brought Us Here" should be replaced with the motto, "Unity, Justice, Equality." For the present motto implies that only those who came here are citizens and not

76 Holphe, "Class Analysis", p. 17.
those who were here.\textsuperscript{77}

Tolbert met his opposition with increased suppression of public opinion. He even went so far as to suspend a reporter for criticising his regime. Tolbert also curbed the university in a speech given at the induction of Dr. J. Bernard Blamo as the President of the University of Liberia.

Under academic freedom, divergent views are necessary and should be welcomed. But the University should never become a place for uncompromising dissensions, irresponsible action or a breeding ground for disorder, disrespect, disruption, sectionalism, Tribalism and national division.\textsuperscript{78}

The radicals to whom this message was directed were not only the indigenous Liberian students but the students from 'ruling Liberian families;' the latter group articulated the majority of the grievances. These students and others are seen as a potential threat to the political stability of Liberia. In December of 1974, "the President warned that:

\begin{quote}
trouble makers are enemies of the state and all enemies of the state must be destroyed.\textsuperscript{79}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{77}Dr. Edward Kesselly, "Five Points for the Future", a Coronation marking the 125th Anniversary of the Declaration of Independence in Sanniquelie on July 26, 1972, in Holphe, "Class Analysis", p. 22.

\textsuperscript{78}Remarks by the President of Liberia, Dr. William R. Tolbert Jr. as Visitor of the University of Liberia in Holphe, "Class Analysis", p. 27.

\textsuperscript{79}\textit{Africa Today}, August, 1978. pssm.
The suppression of opposing forces by President Tolbert was overshadowed by the astonishing increase in Liberia's GNP. Tolbert's regime embarked on a program of Humanistic Capitalism similar to that of Kaunda's in Zambia. This program represents a superficial synthesis of two opposing ideals of communalism vs. individualism. The former is displayed by voluntary donations to the regime by Liberians for national development, a process called "Rally Time." Individualism is exercised by the capitalistic ideology of individual mobility at any cost.

President Tolbert claims that the funds collected during Rally Time are for the development of the hinterland, but little on the agenda is supportive of that claim. The roads, as mentioned, are from the hinterland to the coast for extraction of resources which seem to benefit the foreign investors moreso than the Blacks in the interior. The major hospital that was constructed, John F. Kennedy, is not accessible to the people of the hinterland since it was constructed in Monrovia. Only two schools were constructed, their locations are on the outskirts of Monrovia, still inaccessible to the interior population. 80

The largest expenditure of sixty million dollars was on the Organization of African Unity (OAU) summit hall, named the OAU village. The OAU will meet in 1979, then the construction will be-for all intents and purposes-obsolete.

80 Africa Today, August 1978, psm.
Tolbert maintains however that it could be used for a tourist attraction.

As mentioned, the Open Door Policy increased foreign investments from "23.1 million in 1966 to over 180 million by 1977."\(^{81}\) It appears as if this figure will increase since the recent opening of the Industrial Free Zone near Monrovia. This new investment incentive's major function is to allow foreign investors to repatriate the gross of their profits, "in order to cover rising prices for equipment, expatriate salaries and other extra costs."\(^{82}\) The rising salary that the investors have to contend with is an increase of fifty cents on the one dollar minimum wage. The lack of materials on the present Liberian situation make it difficult to fully verify whether the interior population is actually benefiting from the influx of foreign investors. Yet if the emphasis is on bringing foreign companies in, it is very probablistic that the bulk of revenue generated will go out of the country. An overview of the way some of Liberia's funds have been spent make obvious the intentions of the President to enhance his own individualistic concerns and those of the Americo-Liberians, not those of the original Liberians.

We can see then, that throughout the settlement period and even up to the present, the Americo-Liberians organized

\(^{81}\) Ibid., p. 88.

\(^{82}\) Ibid., p. 97.
the political economy to meet their needs and relegated the needs and rights of the indigenous population to the lower rung of the ladder. Decision making has always been and remains today in the hands of the former "displaced settlers". The economic conditions of the state of Liberia continue to border on bankruptcy with a small elite enjoying handsome political and economic privileges while the majority struggle for survival. This results in caste-like stratification of the population and goes far towards explaining why development as opposed to temporary growth never took place in Liberia.
CHAPTER IV
EDUCATION IN LIBERIA

In the preceding sections of this endeavour, an attempt was made to present a holistic view of the historical development of Liberia. The focus on the political and economic structure of Liberia was intended to serve as a foundation on which other aspects of Liberia's social milieu could be examined. An underlying hypothesis guiding this work is that the structure of the political-economy is a determining factor in the social relations of that society.

The field of education was selected as an area of investigation for two major reasons; one, it is held by this writer that education represents the ideological apparatus of the state through which the values, beliefs and ethos necessary for the maintenance and growth of the state are disseminated; secondly, in the case of Liberia, the level of one's education has been the determining factor for upward mobility in that society. Education has been the symbolic tool used by the ruling elite to prevent the aborigines from being fully incorporated into the societal structure.

The aforementioned phenomenon is not only evident
in Liberia but in most Third World countries.* The degree to which one can imitate the oppressor, i.e. the elitist group that exercises control of the state, determines the degree in which one is "civilized," thereby acceptable in westernized society. The function of education is to acculturate and socialize one into acceptance of the dominant ethos, as prescribed by the ruling group. This process is "society saturated" in that it takes place in all formal and informal institutions of society. One begins inculcating these values beginning with the family, peers and more overtly in formal structures such as the school, church and the media.

The concern of this writer is with those formalized institutions that have been established by the state, i.e. economic, political, ideological and repressive appara, for the purpose of appropriating supportive beliefs necessary for its maintenance. This process will be hitherto referred to as schooling, differentiated from education in it's specific function. The major hypothesis is that the

*Third World is a United Nations designation for countries with a relatively low GNP which would encompass most of Africa, Asia and the Latin America's.

quantity and quality of schooling disseminated is determined by the economic and political requirements of the society in question. In the Liberian situation, the establishment of an elitist schooling system has contributed to the stratification of Liberian society. Schooling effected employment, social status and determined political participation in the nation. The method in which this was accomplished will be examined in this chapter.

The Role of Schooling

The schools in the Third World are not controlled by nor do they serve the interests of oppressed people, i.e. those people that are mentally and physically exploited by the ruling elite. Formalized schooling is an elitist function for the individual mobility of the dominant class. Schooling merely represents an ideological guise; for, as long as the oppressed believe they will be incorporated and will advance in the system, they will not pose a threat to the political order.

The belief in upward mobility through schooling fosters feelings of inferiority in those that do not possess formalized training or skills. The quest "to be" precipitates on the opposing side a low profile of oneself. Oppressed people should be taught that education is an ongoing "society saturated" process; therefore, learning takes place from the whole environment. Also that it is all right to pursue formalized training for expansive
purposes, not exploitive. They should be proud of what they are and strive to be themselves instead of some superficial professional that has been superimposed on them by the western world. The aforementioned points can be exemplified by noting that in an essay written by adult students in a Liberian night school to whom the question of why they wanted an education was posed, all the students listed the material rewards of education, "but over half mentioned that by getting an education, they hoped to gain in prestige or 'respect'".

Before, my people were all slaves. Government made them work on roads and farms, no pay. Now I go to school, I get respect, I be no longer slave. 84

The intended implication is that the human element is viewed as something to be acted upon instead of being perceived as a functional growing being who should be able to utilize the schooling process to not only serve society but for personal development as well. Due to the structure and function of formalized institutions, an individual is not taught to think creatively beyond what is, to deal with themselves through self-awareness which ultimately stifles their full mental development.

According to Carter G. Woodson, people are not educated but "mis-educated" into being submissive to the labour market for survival. 85 In the case of most Third

84Fraenkel, Tribe and Class..., p. 208.

World countries and rural areas in developed countries where people are needed for mere physical labour, such as agricultural work, youth are not schooled at all. This is what one can detect in Liberia for the descendents of the Americo-Liberians have traditionally been schooled but the Blacks that live in the interior have not had access to formal schooling. It is believed by this writer that that privilege was withheld because the aborigines were merely needed to perform physical labour, also this is a tool used to keep them in an inferior status.

Liberian Schools

Most of the schools in Liberia are on the coastal area surrounding Monrovia, to be utilized by the Liberian elite. The schools that exist in the interior for the aborigines are very poorly structured. It is ironic that the schooling process is viewed as the road to success and there are no proper facilities provided to the indigenous population in order to attain an education. The structure of Liberia's schooling process is patterned after the type instituted in the United States; therefore, the system is lacking a learner analysis, i.e. a study of the students environment, characteristics, etc. in order to enable one to develop a curriculum that corresponds to the students to be taught. The students in Liberia have
to learn English two years before matriculation in the schooling process; therefore they tend to get discouraged by being overaged. The result is low enrollment for school age students and a high drop out rate of sixty percent of the school population before they reach the fourth grade.\(^8\) The state has thus met its objective of preventing the original Blacks from entering and participating as other than mere workers.

At the inception of colonialism, private individuals in an attempt to "solve the Negro problem by colonization," decided "to promote and execute a plan for colonizing (with their consent) the Free People of Colour." This same society, the ACS, determined the type of economy the colony would have and educated American Blacks in the colony to maintain it. It was in the name of moral obligation to educate a few Blacks that formalized schooling institutions were founded.\(^7\)

This policy of education for a few continued and was supported by the fact that there were mainly missionary, traditional, i.e., Mohammedan and Poro schools, and very few government schools for the aborigines. With the concession granted to Firestone in 1926 to extract rubber, the


relation between the U.S. and the political apparatus of Liberia became more intertwined. It is held by this writer that these economic interests in Liberia changed the status of the economy and also changed the quantitative amount of schooling dispensed.

Firestone was granted a concession by the Liberian government for ninety-nine years, "on a million acres of land suitable for the production of rubber or other agricultural products..." At the same time Firestone made a loan of $2,500,000 to the Liberian government. Firestone's presence has been viewed by the political apparatus as advantageous to Liberia for they not only assisted the government in encouraging further investments, they also encouraged small independent producers by serving as a market while they controlled the "production of ninety percent of the rubber output of the country."88

Contemporary writers on political economy suggest that extensive foreign investments are disadvantageous to the majority of the population in that a large percentage of raw materials and their corresponding value are extracted from the country.89


89 See Walter Rodney, How Europe Underdeveloped Africa, (Tanzania Publishing House 1972), for a full discussion on the extrapolation of resources and its effect on Africa.
Prior to and during settlement, Liberia's basic economy was agrarian for most of the people were in subsistence agriculture. The crops included cassava, rice, palmnuts, coffee, pineapples, peanuts, cocoa, etc. Because of the tsetse fly, there was little or no livestock. With this type of economy, mass education was not necessary for exploitative purposes. Firestone had its rubber plantations on the coastline, where the major metropole and a few communities in that area "benefitted" from the blessings of schooling. The Firestone plantation had to establish a place to house their labour and set up schools for the children who would later serve as workers for Firestone.90

In 1936, one author stated that up until that year, there had been practically no schools whatsoever in the interior country. In that year President Edwin Barclay entered upon a three year program of education development and pledged to establish a school in every native village.91

In fact, at that time the political apparatus was preparing the economy for future expropriation of capital. The U.S. had a stake and in order to protect it from intrusion by other capitalist powers in case another economic


outlet was revealed, the two governments signed a "General Agreement for Technical Assistance and Cooperation" and established the Joint Commission for Economic Development. When the political apparatus put emphasis on economic development with external assistance (going on the assumption that the area could not develop its own resources), a work force had to be created to supply the needs of foreign investors. One way was to educate the work force. In the 1930s Firestone established schooling on the plantation for children of their employees. Formal instruction extended to the sixth grade and was patterned after the U.S. system. This was an investment for Firestone for these meagerly educated youth later became Firestone employees. Government schools existed on the coastal area prior to the setting up of plantation schools, but to date, neither Firestone nor the government has formalized schooling for the indigenous Liberians who reside in the hinterland. Even those schools on the coastal area which some indigenous people attend, were established 138 years later than the schools for Americo-Liberians, and these state supported schools only exist in a portion of the coastal villages. Only missionary and traditional schooling was extended to the 95% rural population.

Most of the petty bourgeoisie, i.e. those who worked in national capitalistic production, sent their children to the "mother countries" to be educated. This cost the government over $2,000,000 between 1941-1961.93

The influx of foreign investments required an educated yet submissive work force. This is when the policy of National Unification as expounded by President Tubman came into effect. It was then thought that education was equated with social mobility. The democratization of the indigenous population was done in order to make them realize that their economic future was based on their social development within the frame of the nation.94

Ethnocentrism permeated the state and therefore the schooling system. The basis of the school system stemmed from the notion that those students from a particular class i.e. Americo-Liberians, should be educated, others should be tolerated. In the words of the Secretary of Public Instruction in 1960, the indigenous population was viewed as:

illiterates suffering from diseases and deficient sanitary conditions. Their method of cultivation and harvesting as primitive and uneconomical; their nutrition is insufficient and they lack


some of the things necessary for a happier existence, particularly the know how.\textsuperscript{95}

Nathaniel Massaquoi concluded by stating that the schooling of this portion of the population will improve these conditions. Undergirding the impact of industrialization and urbanization, it was held that the indigenous people could be transformed from an underdeveloped, primitive existence to an industrial and diversified people. In Massaquoi's analysis, he referred to the indigenous people as being individualistic and as being aware of the advantages of education and culture.\textsuperscript{96}

The comment made by Massaquoi about the notion of individualism is in this author's opinion a faulty perception which is one of the major reasons why schooling for the masses of Liberians is itself faulty; for, the way one perceives is the way one will prescribe. "The farmers all live in the villages. In no case does the farmer live in isolation on the land which has been apportioned to him by the chief."\textsuperscript{97} Next, it could be assumed from Massaquoi that "tribal" existence is equated with illiteracy. Yet besides missionary and state schools, there are other schools...

... the Poro schools and the Mohammedan schools ... the Poro Society (long before the Republic of

\textsuperscript{95} Massaquoi, "Unification ...," pp. 151-152.
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid.
Liberia was established) conducted its' "bush" schools; schools that trained the youth to take place in the existing society. They are still enforced in the Liberian hinterland. The Mohammedans have a regular system of education whereby individual teachers teach individual disciplines.98

The policy effectiveness of the Unification proposal can be questioned in face of the amount of schooling that was actually facilitated. In 1955, the first class of thirty-two teachers graduated from a fundamental education center at Klay, in the Liberian hinterland. The teachers returned to their home villages, scattered throughout Liberia to run primary schools. In 1959, the eleven hundred elementary school teachers were tested, eighty-five percent had achieved the academic level expected of an American sixth grade child or lower. The teachers are not only ill trained, but badly paid as well.99

There are said to be schools established by the state on the coast; yet, in December of 1970 in the town of Balama, four miles from Monrovia, home of the Kpelle people, 93.8% had not attended western schools, in Baokwele, 90.9% had not attended these institutes. In other towns, out of a survey of five towns, 90.6% had not attended

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98 Soloman, "Education....", p. 223.
99 Ibid., p. 224.
The political-economy of Liberia is unable to meet the expectations of the indigenous schooling population. There are moves towards accommodating these students through an increase in vocational training. Future employment statistics suggest that 70% of the work force will be in agriculture; yet, less than 2% of the secondary students want to be employed in agriculture. There are plans to introduce more vocational tracks in the high schools which presently offer academic tracks. The major vocational school is the Booker T. Washington Institute (BWI), this school had deteriorated to the point where the curriculum is indistinguishable from standard academia.

Eighty-five percent of all of the students in Liberia expect not only to be admitted into college but to graduate. There are presently over 1600 High School graduates each year, only one-fourth of these students will enter the colleges. Over half of the students expect to get graduate degrees; yet, there is no graduate school in Liberia. The government plans to decrease the number of foreign scholarships; therefore, very few students will have the chance to pursue a graduate education. Nearly half of the students wish to be doctors, engineers and

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accountants, "government projections indicate that these three categories will employ less than 5% of the total work force. 102

Current population growth in the urban area is about seven percent annually, at this rate, the population of Monrovia will almost double by 1980. This growth rate would increase the labour force by at least 150,000. To absorb this increase, about 15,000 new jobs would have to be created each year. The annual growth rate of wage employment during the 1960s was no more than four percent. At this rate, "the average number of new jobs created each year during the next decade will be about 6,000 or far fewer than one-half the number required to absorb the estimated growth in the urban labor force." If the current trends continue, there will be chronic urban unemployment in the future. 103

About 70% of the high school students will end up in the urban areas, including the ones already there. They will find that their expectations are unrealistic. Not only will they not get into college, but they will not be able to find employment. These students were told that the road to success is through education. They believed it and their parents believed it.

102 Ibid., p. 28.
103 International Labour Office Report in Hayden, p. 23.
If these projections hold true for the children of the elite, the future of the indigenous youth is even more bleak. Because of the attitudes and skills imported through the formal schooling system, it is likely that political unrest and social upheaval will characterize Liberian society for years to come. The social stratification fostered by the educational system impedes development of an egalitarian society in Liberia.
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

The historical methodological approach was utilized in this thesis in order to note the institutionalization and development of stratification in Liberia. It was held in this work that stratification between the Americo-Liberians and the indigenous population was precipitated by the economic organization of capitalism and maintained through the ideological, political and repressive organs of that state. This theory represents an elaboration and application of Karl Marx' analysis of the state. Marxian theory presents a holistic gestalt of the state in which its activities are determined by the structure of the economy, the apparatuses of the state work to maintain and entrench the economy through ideological and political means.

Another theory on which this writer attempted to elaborate is that the socio-economic imperatives of capitalism and the ideology it generates is the primary cause of Black inter-racial conflict in Liberia. The cleavages within the Black community are superimposed by the values, ethos and demands of a capitalistic society.

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During the settlement period, one can note the underpinnings of ethnic stratification and the contending variables, i.e., the ACS and the Missionaries that aided in the precipitation of the stratified society. A theoretical justification offered for the Americo-Liberians was that they were reacting from their past forced submission. The settlers were from a hostile environment, one of enslavement. Under these circumstances, a type of inferior competitive personality emerged. There became a need for "self-actualization, to determine one's sense of self, and command over one's destiny." This theory is refuted by the fact that most of the settlers were free born or had attained their freedom before arrival. In any case, it is difficult to justify the stratification of a people, especially if they are of the same ancestry.

The Liberian experience suggests that the bonds of culture are stronger than the bonds of race. The Americo-Liberian settlers clung to the subtle differences that set them apart from the indigenous population. The settlers incorporated all the vices of their former masters and considered themselves their equals, the more nearly they

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"aped" after them. "It was not then, (nor is it today) unusual to hear tribal people refer to the Americo-Liberians as 'white' people." 

Conflict in the interaction of the indigenous population with the Black settlers was expected. The two groups had been socialized differently; the indigenous were socialized for group development, whereas the settlers were socialized for individuality. Had these groups interacted on an equal basis and installed a type of economic arrangement other than capitalism, their diversity and cooperation may have induced development. Capitalism served as an enforcement for stratification because of its individualistic ideology. Capitalism also requires a large pool of unskilled labour to enhance individual economic pursuits and the indigenous population was perfect to fulfill that need.

The politics of Americo-Liberian control and emphasis on educational levels as a determinate of status sharpened and defined class consciousness among the indigenous-Liberians. The reluctance of the controllers of the economy to effectively deal with the aborigines in an advantageous manner served to deepen the existing contradictions. Schooling, which is disseminated by the ideological apparatus of the state, serves as the opiate of the masses in that it fosters the myth of upward mobility and "dignity" by the 

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105 Nesbitt and Williams, Two Black Views, p. 5.
106 Liebenow, Politics in Liberia, p. 15.
inculcation of western values. The dichotomy is thus fostered of high achievement through schooling and the reality of a low economic status because of the economic arrangement. The synthetic outcome of this dialectical situation can only be the transformation of the society to serve the interests of the masses.

In the discussion of the political economy, the role of external forces was discussed to point out that Liberia is a colony of the United States. For, as Brim states:

Through the use of dollar diplomacy, military intervention, and extension of the political, social and religious value systems of the United States, corporate capitalism thrives without the necessity of an outright colonialist apparatus.107

As a colony of the United States, the ideological apparatus, in this case schooling, was used as a tool to facilitate capitalistic notions amongst the population. Stratification is the basis of socio-political unrest in Liberia today. Not only are the indigenous-Liberians suffering politically and economically due to stratification, but they are suffering mentally. The indigenous began incorporating the values that were diffused to them that are associated with inferiority.

The underdevelopment of Liberia is not due simply to lack of resources, but to the resistance of the Americo-Liberians in an attempt to prevent those socio-economic

107 Brim, "The Eagle ....," p. 3.
changes that would threaten their political hegemony.\footnote{108}{Robert Clower, Growth Without Development: An Economic Survey of Liberia, (Northwestern University African Studies, No. 16, 1966), pp. 4-5.} At this point in time, there must be a distinction made between growth and development, the definition expounded by Samir Amin will be utilized for that purpose:\footnote{109}{Samir Amin, "Growth Is Not Development", African Progress, September 1973, pp. 40-41.}

...they are concepts which, although related, deal with profoundly different matters. Growth is essentially a measure of a few relatively easily identifiable units of output; development is a historical process which encompasses not only production, but the entire economic and social life of a nation in transition; its health, education, social outlook the dynamism of its political institutions. Development, true development, is not directed at experts but at the domestic requirements of the national economy, particularly for the great mass of the people, and the satisfaction of their most urgent needs.

Growth without development is a central feature of the Liberian economy. There is enormous growth in primary commodities produced by foreign concessions for export. This has not been accompanied by either structural changes to diffuse gains in real income among all sections of the population. The rapid growth in production between 1950 and 1960 has had little developmental impact on Liberia. It has increased the wage level for unskilled labour and has expanded tax revenues received by the government. The enlarged wage bill had not induced expansion of domestic
production of goods bought by wage workers, it has merely raised imports. Economic growth has also increased tax revenues that have been spent for the most part in ways that do not appreciably increase the productive capacity of the nation.

Liberia needs to incorporate all segments of the society to begin to develop. The clear result of ethnic stratification in Liberia has been social and political conflict and a failure to economically develop the country. This author concludes that a reordering of goals, institutions and privileged status is a necessary first step in the development of a viable economy in Liberia.

Perhaps it is unreasonable to expect the Liberian authorities to have formulated development plans so quickly. What is a matter for concern, however, is not so much the absence of sophisticated development plans as the absence of any plans at all.110

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