

The True Meaning of Independence: Reflection of Our Yesterdays and Vision for Our Tomorrow

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By Syrulwa Somah, PhD

Executive Director, Liberian History, Education and Development, Inc. (LIHEDE) Greensboro, NC

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Associate Professor, Environmental Health and Occupational Safety & Health

NC A&T State University, Greensboro, NC

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Mr. Nathaniel Moses, President of Gibi District Development Associations [GDDA]; Mr. Henry Lawa, Vice President; members of the Board of Directors; Students and Youths; Fellow Gibians; Distinguished guests, ladies & gentlemen.

It is a unique privilege and honor for me to speak before this august gathering at this moment. Today, all over this land of our parentage, from its hilltops to its valleys and plains; from its villages to towns, to districts and cities there is a celebration going on with our famous request for gift, “My 26th is on you-o, ba.” I, too, want to say “My 26th is on you-o, ba.”

Regarding the founding of the Liberian nation, the core problems faced at the infancy of the nation-building process should not be forgotten. To this end, I want to devote my presentation to you this afternoon to five key six and one major arguments. My first point is that Pre-Liberia was a long-developed civilization and independent kingdom. My second point is that some of the current social, economic, cultural, and political gaps in Liberia today are a direct result of the colonial past of our nation, especially tracing back to the U.S.-based organizations that started sending free blacks back to Liberia starting in the early 1800s. My third point is that the Liberian nation came into existence almost by accident, because it was not the intention of the American Colonization Society or ACS, state organizations and shareholders to create a nation that would embrace all the returning settlers and ethnic groups of Liberia. My fourth point is that there was a major divide between the settlers that ran the first colonial government and the rest of the nation, which laid the groundwork for our continuing civil divides. My fifth point is that even though we were able to declare an early ‘independence,’ we never properly learn to defend our own democracy from our own failings.

As during any process of nation-building, the Liberian people faced the prospect of secession and disintegration until 1904; and it took another 54 years (1847-1904) for the integration of our people (Indigenous, Americo-Liberians, Congo, and Caribbean stocks) because of both external and internal factors that were not of our own making. This period is what is referred to as National Unification or the development of a new type of nation-state, because our people were defining of the concept of nation-state, integration, and assimilation—maintaining our own identity, and differences between first, second and third generation. Hence, Liberia's political history ran a rocky course during the colonial era, beyond and up to now.

Taking these points into consideration, we must realize that any efforts to bridge the current gaps in Liberian society must include Liberian studies to educate our people about ourselves. In Liberia today, the miseducation of our

peoples continues to be a serious hindrance to the socioeconomic growth and development of Liberia. This is the major argument of my presentation and I invite you to join me in exploring the unique history of Liberian nationhood that led to the need we have today for a stronger Liberian curriculum in all levels of education.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, I know you might be anxious to join me right away in exploring the main points of my presentation, but I want to begin with our own state of affairs as people of Gibi. Gibi was the name of the pit where the people hid after running away from the invading Mane. Thus literally speaking, Giï = slaves and bii= hole (slave town or slave hideout) near Wohn Town, was an unburned farm that was later turned into a town.

Some of us would declare with emotion that Gibi was the mosaic or melting pot of Liberia's various ethnic groups. Historians would venture that inter-ethnic conflict as the result of the Mane invasion (the Mani war), and the introduction of rice and iron, pushed one ethnic group against another. But it was not long that the Bassa, Kpelle, Dan, Mano, Kissi, Gola, Krao, Lorma, Grebo, Wee, Vai, and Dei people of Margibi met at the location of the unburned farm (Wohn Town) and smoked the peace pipe. They threw their weapons of war into the Piimai River, near the unburned farm (Wohn Town), and all the citizens of Gibi have been able to live in peace ever since.

Fellow Gibians, Gibi was a place where the citizens collectively circled their problems in the Zoe Grove, or Oracle, beneath Bea Mountain. It may be interesting to you to know that the name of our scared Mt. Bea derived from a Kpelle man named Kollie, who was a hunter. According legend, he shot an elephant that ran to the mountain. In chasing down the elephant, the people were instructed to circle the mountain, thereby creating the word, "bean," to circle.

Today, just as yesterday, any child born and raised in Margibi County is bound to learn how to speak the Bassa, Kpelle, Dan, Mano, Krao, Kissi, Gola, Lorma, Grebo, Wee, Vai, and Dei languages that make up the tapestry of the local culture, communities, and chiefdoms. Gibi, to me, represents both the microcosm of the greater Liberian society and the mosaic of a traditional culture that taught myself, and other youth who grew up here, the true meanings of our common ancestry. Hence, during the 14-year civil war in Liberia, the Bassa, Lorma, Kpelle, Dan, Mano, Krao, Kissi, Grebo, Wee, Vai, and Dei came to Gibi and like our forefathers, threw their weapons of war, difference, and have been able to live in peace ever since. Indeed, our people prevailed on the conscious of the warring fighters to escape the area of Gibi, so that today history is written about how our generation, like our forefathers came together and ended the purveyors of such misery in our midst.

Indeed, ladies and gentlemen, I guess I have gone overboard in telling you how I feel about the creation and unification of the people of Gibi. I guess I have gone overboard in bringing to the fore deeply held memories about the place each of us call home. And I guess I have gone overboard in discussing the level of unity and cooperation among the people of Gibi. But let me now return to the main points of my presentation before you this afternoon.

One.

When we talk about independence, Pre-Liberia was indeed independent and had more than a 300-year-old Liberian (Melegueta, Grain, Paradise) Civilization that traded with the Egyptian Pharaoh Necho in 600 BC, and Hanno of Cathage in 520 BC. The melegueta pepper was said to have been an extremely valuable trade commodity at the time for its culinary and medicinal qualities, so the name "Grain Paradise" or "Grain Coast" came about for the Liberian coast, as this was the principal item of the barter trade that existed during that era. In addition, Pre-Liberia was independent because our forefathers traded with the Americas via ship and plied the Atlantic Ocean as far as 1500 B.C. We know this because records of Aggrey beads, bronze, metal tools, and the discovery of scaled hard brick clay burial pyramids and sphinx images, an image in the form of a lion lying with a man's head, were discovered in present-day Paynesville City in the later part of 1972. This establishes a Pre-Liberia-Egyptian connection to global trade and travel, or in other words, evidence of a rich civilization.

In 1200 A.D, Spanish traders in search of Pre-Liberia's wealth arrived on our shores and met our parentage, who were not—at the time—sitting around waiting for crumbs to fall from European generosity for them to eat. Several others nationalities came in droves in 1364 and 1413, including the French, English, Dutch, Swiss, and other western European traders. As we learned, the likes of Pedra de Cintra who visited in 1461 gave birth to Cape Mount (or Cabo do Monte in Spanish) and Cape Mesurado, where our brothers and sisters freed from their bondage first landed. Flemish ships also came to the coast to trade gold from 1475 to 1479. Dutch traders arrived at the Melegueta Civilization in 1611, followed by the Swedish traders in 1700s for one purpose: interdependent trading.

Explorers like Vasco da Gama and Pedro da Cintra wrote about our civilization in their records, and corroborated the facts that people settled and traded with Europeans as equals, not inferiors. The registries of Vasco da Gama, Drapper Ofert, and others provide ample evidence that the area known today as Liberia had an independent civilization in which our parentage was not only advanced in their customs and traditions, but in international trading with merchants from Dieppe who arrived first to set up semi-permanent settlements during the Malaguatta Civilization; among them were Grand Dieppe and Petit Dieppe, located at present-day Buchanan and Greenville. The malagueta pepper and basket-weaving industry were so huge that Rio dos cestos or River Cess was coined after the basket in which the people of Pre-Liberia traded their malagueta.

Pre-Liberian people were doctors, lawyers, scientists, economists, judges, and servicemen, who were trained in learning institutions such as the Poro and Sande Universities. Our Melegueta Civilization of pre-Liberia embodied forms of laws and established form of government. These traditional kingdoms were by their very essence democratic, based around the organic independence of individuals, without whom the Kingdom would have no substance.

The Liberian civilization would later produce three important scripts that Europeans had no part to play. For example, the Vai Script inventor, Duwalu Bukehdeh, was a descendant of the Malian stock. Similarly, Mr. Kisimi Kamara, inventor of the Mende script, came from Mali civilization. Thirdly, Kpelle Script inventor, Gbili Sanoyea, came from the Sudan. For the Loma Script, its inventor, Widor Zobo, came from the Malian Empire. And the Bassa script, 'Ehni Ka Se Fa,' the Bassa alphabet, came from Abassania. For example, the Mende script's identical format and usage has been discovered in Mexico ancient Olmec monuments, which is dated 1000 B.C. to 500 B.C.

The fulcrum of the Melegueta Civilization was a unique blacksmith technology. The Poro and Sande Universities supplied the human capitol's cutlasses, axes and money. Kissi money was the medium of exchange in Liberia and Sierra Leone for a long, long time before the British Pound interrupted the region's medium of exchange. This technology made us to have plenty of food and other agriculture produce to support our family. It is not a coincidence that our nation was called the 'bread basket of Africa.'

All these achievements by our people are reasons that Liberia was not colonized, meaning truly invaded, occupied and controlled by European nations during the scramble for Africa and the continent's partition in 1914. In viewing Liberia's history, it is very importance to understand how our nation was independent and never colonized, and how we came to celebrate July 26 as our independence.

Two.

The Liberian nation came into existence almost by accident, because it was not the intention of the American Colonization Society, or ACS, to create an independent nation. The Liberian foundation was a non-monolithic philosophy in 1822. First, keep in mind that even though you have been taught that only ACS founded Liberia, there were actually three kinds of settlement agencies [ACS, Proprietary, and State sponsored] that populated Liberia. In the interest of time, I will focus on the above three.

Now, the ACS colony was under the direct control of philanthropic organizations that supplied them with needs from America. The state was controlled by entities in the US that invested in the repatriation or provided grant

money. Then, there was also a proprietary colony was controlled by individuals who got fed up with the American Colonization Society. The idea of the settlers standing by their countrymen, right or wrong, in the same spirit that a family stands by a wayward son was absent. These disagreements and tensions during the building of the settlement didn't make it easier for Liberians to build a united nation.

There was a natural conflict between the proprietary and popular elements in the colony, which began under Jehudi Ashmun, a white American, who was in charge of the colony in 1822, up to J. J. Roberts, the first president. Additionally, because of a lack of central power, as well as the lack of financial support, it was not an easy task to build one nation for all. That is to say the first twenty-five years of Liberia's existence were under colonial administration or "Colonial Assembly." The Colonial Assembly was not only in-charge of everything, but was also the executive branch of the government of the settlement. For example, one of the first significant governors was Jehudi Ashmun, who was a member of the Colonial Assembly. As such, the Governor was the chief justice of Liberia Colony, at the same time that he was commander of the Colony and had control over the Colony's economic supplies and everything pertaining to the Colony. In addition to the Colonial Assembly, there were the dark-skinned freed slaves who didn't hold allegiance to the Colonial Assembly and the light-skinned freed slaves who did. In other words, the light-skinned or mulattoes were the indisputable leaders that controlled everything in early Liberia based on skin color and did not readily share power with the darker skinned people. This sort of division based on skin color was a great source of conflict in early Liberia, and a major source of conflict throughout Liberian history. This sort of conflict also resulted in a very strong and powerful Executive Branch of government that created an all-powerful imperial presidency, where the president of Liberia exercised unrestrained power over the Liberian people and the other two branches of the Liberian government, the judicial and the legislative branches that would haunt Liberia and its people for more than 164 years.

Fellow Gibians, it needs to be re-emphasized that Liberia's colonial era was a far more complex undertaking than one might draw from the reporting of other sources. For example, most of the settlers who remained mostly in the coastal areas of Monrovia, Buchanan, Edina, Harper, and Robertsport didn't bridge the gap between the hinterland and the coastal regions. As a result of such a condition, Liberia started as a divided nation. The coastal government that the leaders of the Pre-Liberia Kingdom didn't recognize as a national government tried to run their affairs. For example, the greater part of the Krao Kingdom was without the settlers' control even when Maryland became a republic, and up to the time Liberia declared its independence. In border areas like Ivory Coast and Sierra Leone, it was no different. Liberia's occupation in these areas led to frontier troubles with Great Britain and disputes with France because the Monrovia-based government had not been in these areas. In other words, to nations like Great Britain, France and Germany, the ACS was not a nation in a real sense. Therefore, the British did not recognize the ACS, nor were they inclined to pay any taxes.

Three.

Another way that the nation-making of Liberia was unplanned was that the ACS, state organizations and shareholders never had it in mind to embrace all the returning settlers and the ethnic groups of Liberia. Indeed, fellow Gibians and citizens, it was on this 26th of July in 1847 that our nation took a gigantic step. Our nation figuratively put one foot on Mount Nimba, rested another foot on Mount Wologisi, facing the Atlantic Ocean, rested her back on Circle Mountain, present-day Bea and declared our unification/nationhood to world, 'I am the Republic of Liberia: The Lone Star of Africa is forever!'

We had cause to celebrate because it was in the face of three colonial powers, such as Great Britain, France and Germany, that Liberia became a united people. Just imagine the bravery, courage and perseverance!

If you have not learned anything from this exchange or heard me, remember one thing: Liberia had to 'declare premature independence' to the world due to lack of respect for the ACS, and European imposition of their meaning of independence. Fellow Liberians, the Declaration of independence didn't bring Liberia any ease. Our new

unification remained under constant threat. For example, on March 20, 1882, the Queen of England dispatched four British men-of-war to Liberia along with Sir A.E. Havelock, Governor of Sierra Leone, as a delegation to Liberia. The team did not have a mandate to negotiate, but instead their job was to warn President Gardiner that "Her Majesty's Government can not in any case recognize any rights on the part of Liberia to any portions of the territories in dispute." This time the claim was that they needed to suppress the Dei and Gola who were threatening British interests in Sierra Leone. Hence, without any provocation, they occupied a region once called Kanrelahun. The story behind the whole occupation was that the land was occupied because it was very fertile and also provided easy access to the Sierra Leonean railway. Liberia refused to let go Kanrelahun but like in 1892, the British gave Liberia £6000 and exchanged the area with some unfertile land.

Our people issued a protest to France, Germany, other great powers, even the United States where the settlers had migrated from, but protest fell on deaf ears. Therefore, for eight consecutive years, the British endlessly intimidated our unification for our land and tricked us. They stole a huge chunk of the land, leaving a minimal boundary modification that straddled the Mano River without any of the land returned. Resistance without military backing seems a sign of weakness, so in 1904, the British repeated their land encroachment trick. When the C.D.B King government turned to the U.S. for assistance during the Harding presidency, the negotiation dragged on from March to October 1921. While the State Department reportedly sympathized with Liberians, the U.S. Congress interestingly failed to authorize the accord.

Like the British, French steadily expanded its colony through the invasion of local kingdoms, particularly the Krao, Grebo, Sarpo, and Wee [Krahn] Kingdoms. Even though in 1857 the land in these regions of Liberia had been legally owned by Liberia and remained so for 40 years, the French decided to follow in British footsteps. Therefore, just as a British war hero delivered a letter to the Liberian President to take Cedibodo [Artist Island in the Dei Language, present-day Sherbro, the French naval commanders visited the area in 1890 and 1891 to lay claim to parcels of land in Grand Cape and Grand Bassa Counties. Since Liberia did not have a standing military, France forcibly took the eastern region of the Cavalla River and handed Liberia 25,000 francs. Certainly, France and Britain caused Liberia to lose about 128,000 square miles between 1870 and 1910 to internal conflict, and partly owing to the expansion of Sierra Leone, the Ivory Coast and Guinea. The corollary has been the Liberia's B-shaped map of today.

As I mentioned before, Liberians had managed to carve a national identity years before this, when our people began trading with the Arabs and Europeans. The ethnic groups of three distinctive "Niger-Congo" stocks melted into a new race of kingdom, comprising of more than 800,000 people who founded the Pre-Liberia civilization. The "first citizens" of Pre-Liberia "melted together" into a harmonious and independent kingdom. To this dynamic mosaic, some 5,000 people who were captured from other parts of the Continent—mainly from Matadi, a seaport in Congo—were resettled in Liberia as the new Promised Land. Liberia was to be where a fusion of different oppressed people and culture would land as an ideal republic, and a "city upon a hill."

Out of this culturally and ethnically mixed "melting pot," a new diet spiced with ginger, as the result of trade with India and China, came to be. This diet was probably brought by some 350 settlers who came from Barbados and became Liberian citizens. Recent Liberian historians and other documents have suggested that individuals such as Arthur and Edwin Barclay, who became Presidents of Liberia, brought the ginger crops to Liberia. Our second staple food cassava—commonly known as Yucca tapioca or manioc—which is native to Brazil and Paraguay, or the Amazon basin, would emerge. The likelihood is that some of our nation's citizens and traders, who came from South America, brought the plant with them and it was adopted by the coast-side dwellers, especially the Bassa and Die (Dewion) who added a special ways (dumboy and fufu) of preparing it, which is now a part of Liberian diet. Legend had it that JJ Roberts, Liberia's first president used the dish doobei (dumboy) during his State inauguration celebration.

Of the more than 15,000 settlers who came from Mainland American plantations also did their part to add to the new Liberian identity. The likes of pork and Collard greens were introduced to Liberia, which Liberians were able adapt to their own way of preparing. The discussion of Liberian diet and staple food cannot end without talking about the heart of the matter: Rice! The people of Pre-Liberia have been harvesting this crop for about 3000 years. Reportedly, it was the staple food for Abassina who lived along the Nile River.

The Grebo who came along with the Bassa, Sarpo, Kru (Klao), Belle (Kuwaa), Krahn (Wee), Dei (Dewion) would develop a special way of cooking palm butter sauce. Its use crosses Liberia, as well as those in the Diaspora. The Via would become known for cooking cassava leaf in a special way. An important part of all these dishes are peppers of all kinds, some of which came from Egypt, India, Niger, and Jamaica to make, for example, Killi Willie, Sammy's Mechen, pepper fish", etc. Mangoes, bananas, sugarcanes, and other fruits from Asia would also influence Liberian diets.

Four.

I have briefly combed through history to bring you to speed on what we went through as a united people to father a republic. Liberia's situation was more than David taking on Goliath in those days, facing the likes of Great Britain, France and Germany. These multiple problems drove the young colony to early 'independence' when the ACS summoned the Bassa Colony and Sinoe Colony to Montserrado to declare independence—especially because there was such a divide of loyalties with the settlers from America and the indigenous Liberians.

The case of declaring independence was put before the representatives of the counties but the Grand Bassa County delegations argued that Liberia was not yet ready to declare independence in the face of all the adversities, especially with the American government, the indigene relations and the colonial expansions. First the Bassa delegation was concerned with the light-skinned freed enslaved black-run Colonial Assembly. The Bassa delegation recognized the divide not just between the freed enslaved blacks and indigenous Liberians, but also between the light skin freed enslaved blacks and the dark skinned freed enslaved blacks, the later of which who didn't hold allegiance to the Colonial Assembly. In other words, the mulattoes were the indisputable leaders that controlled everything based on skin color, and had allegiance to the Colonial Assembly, so they got its fullest support. Thus, they did not readily share power with the darker skin pioneers. In other words, the Executive branch of the colony government became so powerful that all "loyal opposition" collapsed. The Bassa were arguing that the Monrovia-based government was controlling the money and therefore the minds of the people. The Bassa wanted to delay independence because they knew that to declare independence in such an environment would suffocate democracy.

Second, there was the issue about ownership of the land. The Monrovia-based government had not only defined its own territory, it was run by 20-30 families. For example, most of its 10,000 – 12,000 population exclusively resided on the coastal region and had not integrated the majority of the population—whose number was in the hundreds of thousands—into the central government. Third, the nation had no military to defend its territory nor was its massive interior population enjoying any government benefits such as schools, hospitals, or roads, just to name a few. Four, the nation had no flag or anthem or national identity as a rally point. However, the Monrovia-government rejected Grand Bassa delegation concerns and asked to forge ahead.

When the Grand Bassa delegation did not move, the delegation was told that they would be held 'hostage' until they compromised. After several negotiations the Grand Bassa reluctantly did pen the declaration of independence in the name of brotherhood. This is how the four stripes on the Bassa County flag were drawn in honor of the four country men who came to the declaration convention. Liberia became one for the few nations that declared independence without mapping its territory, reaching out to its interior population or having a representative government.

These were no easy challenges but we made it as a people and nation. Yet we spoke up! So, our unification was given its due respect, when was announced. Since then, the red, white and blue is celebrated with pomp and gaiety,

across the length and breadth of Liberia. Cultural programs and flag-hoisting ceremonies are the predominant affair of the day, while songs from traditional to modern, culture displays, and speeches fill the light blue skies throughout the day, to symbolize our freedom. We must be thankful and indulge ourselves in remembering our heroes of the freedom struggle and pay reverence to our forefathers as we are doing in all the schools, colleges, organization across our land.

Five.

But getting independence and protecting it as a united people is another thing. The first responsibility that devolves upon us is the protection and promotion of our democracy. Sadly, after 133 years of settler rule, Liberia, a record holder of the second longest history of nationhood south of the Sahara, came down with a dose of the coup virus on April 12, 1980 and fell by the hand of a young Master Sergeant named Samuel K. Doe and his non-commissioned army officers. At that moment, we decided not to uphold our democracy by being our brothers and sisters keepers. Mind you, Liberia almost lost statehood in the 1920s when we almost became a nation of the League of Nations like Togo and Namibia, had it not been for Charles Dunbar Burgess King calling on major paramount chiefs in Kakata. According to legend, on that day, Indigenes, Americo-Liberians, and Congo agreed to offer ritual or human sacrifice. The sacrifice and good Liberian lawyers saved our nation. The problem that almost caused Liberia its nationhood was Charles Dunbar Burgess King, whose administration was charged with practicing slavery and forced labor by the Christy Commission of the 'League of Nations' (which later became the United Nations), which led to his resignation.

Fast forward to President Doe's administration. Our nation would refuse to unite, find a common ground and protect our democracy and civilization. Therefore, on December 24, 1989, Liberia awoke to the voice of Charles MacArthur Taylor, who was supposed to have been sitting in jail in the United States. The National Patriotic Front (NPF), that would become a household name, launched an all-out offensive, directly calling on President Doe to step down as president.

On 23 November 2005, we got tired with 14 years of civil wars and went to the polls. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf came to the presidency. Despite massive foreign aid and what seems a resurgence of national affluence, the state of the people's lives remains pathetic as corruption has become entrenched, defying the human will to keep silent. In some cases, one person lives on a daily income of less than US\$2 and many others struggle to survive on US\$1 a day or less. This severity of hunger, poverty, and malnutrition are the primary factors interacting to create an enormous setback to socioeconomic development, especially in the rural areas of Liberia. Corruption has become the number one contributor to poverty, violence, and underdevelopment in the new Liberia, in which—according to traditional values—no one was to be left begging ever again.

My point is that democracy means more, much more, than the right to vote and one vote for every man and every woman of the prescribed age. Democracy means recognition of the rights of a nation's citizens. Democracy means equality of opportunity for all in education, national development, in public service, and in private and public employment—I repeat, and in private and public employment. Democracy means the protection of the weak against the strong and the fast eater against the slow.

Democracy means the obligation of the minority to recognize the right of the majority to enjoy the God given natural resources of their nation. Democracy means responsibility of the government to its citizens, the protection of the citizens from the exercise of raw power and the violation of human freedoms and individual rights. Democracy means no official religion or freedom of worship for all and the subordination of the right of any ethnic group to the overriding right of the humankind. Democracy means freedom of expression and freedom of assembly.

Sadly, we promoted discrimination and scattered our independence, thinking that one Liberian is more Liberian than the next. It became: Diaspora Liberian vs. home-based Liberians as opposed one people, one nation, one destiny.

There is nothing wrong with feeling great about your country. But along with the thought, 'I am more Liberian than you,' comes the idea: 'I am better than you.'

The root thought that, 'I am better than you' implies other Liberian citizens are inferior. With this root thought, ethnic groups and citizens indulge in actions that only widen the rift between our nation and people. There is a need to bring in a new perspective of looking at ourselves as 'Liberian citizens' from the collective history we have made.

Final Argument: Liberian Education

Brothers and sisters, we lost the independence we had in Pre-Liberia and many of the gains we made along the way. For example, our nation is under United Nations military protection. Looking back at the history of the presence of the UN, you will see that it has used every means at their disposal to break up the Liberian people from uniting whenever we gained strength. Their obvious concern is to make it impossible for us to see our oneness to influence and exploit the country at will.

History has taught us that, in order to protect and safeguard our independence and sovereignty, it is imperative for the country to possess a modern military trained in holding allegiance to Liberia and for the military to be at one with the people. Only when a nation possesses a modern patriotic military capability, will it be possible to ensure the full protection of its sovereignty. Independence means never having to ask the UN to protect us from us, because we would have already dealt out justice ourselves. Thus, it can be seen that in every nation of the world, patriotic leaders and experts who hold sovereignty dear have the sense of responsibility to contribute to the strengthening and modernization of the Armed Forces. But six years after the civil war, our military is considered otherwise, headed by a non-Liberian general and unable to protect us as a nation.

Being independence requires that we do all within our reach to produce our own staple food such as rice, beans, cassava, eddoes, sugarcane—the four main crops of our nation. Ladies and gentlemen, the key argument here is that we in Liberia should be able to control our belly and stop the heavy dependence on outsiders for our daily bread. Mind you, I am aware that our people will still be unable to buy food from the market even if the food were available, due to lack of farm-to-market road and a robust national transportation system. If you ever went to the countryside, you will notice huge amounts of cassava, eddoes, pineapples, plantains, sweet potatoes, oranges, pawpaw, plums, grapefruits, butter pearls, etc., that cannot be moved to the urban areas or other parts of the nation where majority of Liberians would need these commodities the most due to the lack of transportation. And I do agree that transportation is key incentive for any successful agricultural production initiative.

But we cannot call ourselves independent people when all of these things are happening to our people while our nation is setting on massive wealth but drowning in corruption and abuses because of mean spirited citizens surrounded our national president. Liberia was poor, Liberia is poor and Liberia will continue to be poor—especially if we, the Liberians, are not ready to change Liberia. Liberia will remain poor if Liberians are not ready to make Liberia rich, which is our true independence.

We are not truly independent. I know independence when see it! I also know poverty because poverty was here in Liberia before I was born and it had become part of life, like the blood through my veins, during my school days. You are not independent, when you are empty for a single day and only get something to eat the next day. That is true dependence, or poverty. Poverty is going empty, with no hope for the future and with promises never redeemed. Poverty is watching your mothers, fathers, brothers, and sisters die from curable diseases like malaria and pain and in sorrow, just because they couldn't get something to eat. Poverty is hearing your grandmothers and grandfathers cry out to the god of death to come take them, because they are tired of this earth. Poverty is when the hopes of your fathers, grandfathers, and great grandfathers just vanish within a blink of an eye, as we saw during fourteen years of civil war, and we continue to see today. I know poverty just like I know the name of this nation.

One way to change this legacy of poverty and dependence is to educate ourselves. It is about time that we in Liberia begin to understand ourselves and our history as Liberians. We need to appreciate our oneness as people of a common homeland, Liberia, by learning about the indigenous Liberian culture and traditions. But if the Liberian school system, that is supposed to be the source of our knowledge, did not teach the political system and ethnic history of Liberia, we will continue to know little or nothing about one another.

Now, the big question is: How do we start teaching ourselves about ourselves in Liberian school to avoid unnecessary conflict? Mind you, I deliberately used the phrase “unnecessary conflict” to warn you that no self-education is free of conflicts, although conflict is not necessarily the preoccupation of peaceful self-education in a democratic nation. But this is something my colleagues and I in LIHEDE wish to reverse.

Currently I am in Liberia to conduct additional research for the Liberian Literature Anthology Project 2012 and have lobbied successfully both house of senates and representatives with written testimonies for the inclusion of Liberian Studies in the revised national education curriculum. I am glad that UL President Dr. Emmett Dennis is giving strong support for Liberian Studies. I have the privilege to address the faculty senate of our national university on the issues of a Liberian Studies curriculum and all indication shows all is moving in the right direction.

Brothers and sisters, my organization LIHEDE is mostly known for its letter writing campaign in 2004 that led to the historic announcement by U.S. President George W. Bush via satellite declaring that Liberia would benefit from the Presidential Malaria Initiative (PMI) funds for \$70 million for malaria control and prevention efforts in Liberia.

However, we are contributing in other areas, especially in discovering ourselves through history. We need to pay attention to our oral histories, legends, linguistic links, documents, spirituality, cultures, words, voices, groves, buildings, oracles, and sacred places of the past. These oral histories and legends should be preserved because they are the lifeblood of peace and stability. These historic resources can tell us time and again who we are, where we came from, and how we got here as Liberians. This is the purpose for Liberian Studies bill I mentioned. I have met both chair and co-chair, the Hons. Nelson Blamo, Martin Frahngalo, and Minister of Education Dr. Othello Gongar. I am speaking about it now, and will continue to speak about until the God of Liberia hears my prayers. The goal of the Bill is to promote peace, unity, and development in Liberia by including in the Liberian grade school, high school, and college curriculums the teaching of Liberian languages, culture, and traditions to help Liberians understand themselves and their self-identity as Liberians.

Brothers and sisters, fellow Gibians, I can tell you this much: that the corridor of human memory is highlighted with proof that those who had changed the world for the better of human existence had no report of distinguished Army Officers. The likes of Isaac Newton, the Wright Brothers, and Thomas Edison committed no atrocities for their 'silent revolution.' We, Liberians, cannot afford to pretend to be independent when we are depending on others to think for us and protect us from ourselves. We, Liberians, cannot afford to pretend to be independent when we are depending on others to feed us, clothe us, write for us, occupy our nation and teach our children foreign histories. We, Liberians, cannot afford to pretend to be independent when we are depending on others to dictate to us, tell us where our mineral resources should be manufactured. And there can be no real independence in poverty and deprivation. We must and need to remember that we should not be at war with each other but should share the same dream of liberation and try together to break the bonds of our colonial umbilical cords that destroyed our Pre-Liberia independence and are still deoxygenating our lifeline to fashion us into a helpless people.

Independence simply means total emancipation that empowers the inner individual to shine and see Liberia in its full cultural, political, economical, and spiritual regalia. We, as Liberians, cannot claim independence when coup-leaders and failed politicians occupy our nation's higher officers, destroy our institutions, siphon our wealth, force our people into refugee camps, mess with our delicate demographic, cultural, traditional balance; enslave, persecute, kidnap, imprison and kill thousands and thousands of innocent civilians. True independence and freedom can only exist in doing what's right, seeing everything, and thinking our own thoughts and acceptance of a higher discipline.

We, as Liberian people can do great things when we start thinking for ourselves. It means claiming ownership of nationalism and patriotism and not betraying Liberia. There is a need for a sweeping and unwavering mental revolution for a total change for Liberia. My final task here today then is to alert all of you all Gibians and Liberians that our nation must not be business as usual and that we must alter the way we work and change leadership in the voting box. Unless you, the people demand it, the killing, suffering, lack on employment, poverty, starvation, dependency, dying will continue.

There is an exit in this coming 2011 election! Vote right! Vote your conscious! Vote for a candidate who willing and cable of unifying our people and history. You have the most powerful weapon in hand to make a change you would like to see in Liberia. You must wisely use your votes. Do not sell your votes just to have your pot for boil for few days. You and I know that wasted years are impossible to regain, that the "clock of life" cannot be rewound, and one of the most stunning realities is that life is not a dress try-out. Speak up when your votes are being taken for granted. Words are powerful. What we say, and how we say, will make a change around you. This is why it is written that the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. The catch words here are "great things."

If we resist self-destruction, self-hatred, mental colonization, and empty our minds of its ills, this generation will find a panacea to undo our entrapments, lying myths, and see ourselves as equals, not 'child-like people' who need shepherding to real independence. We need to take action—to return to our humanity because we are not people who wait for someone to bring opportunity to us. Therefore, we must rise, rise together, all the sons and daughters of Liberia, to forge a new independent and interdependent movement, mental revolution, and election-violence free Liberia. Do not allow anyone to soak your hands in blood and set your home ablaze for any naked power! This new way of seeing ourselves, once enshrined, it then will pass on as "natural" until a new corps of transformational leaders emerge as the dominant power of the geopolitical leaders of Liberia.

For one day, it will be the new corps of Liberian leaders' tasks to gallantly step into history and take our newfound independence, interdependence, mental revolution, and democracy forward. This will finally usher in a new interpretation of independent Liberia, a mightier sword never again to confine a hungry person in the midst of plenty that constitutes Liberia. Today invokes instant reflection of our yesterdays and vision for our tomorrow will be born from whatever we believe is the right thing to do in this nation we called Liberia.

Happy Unification Day