

## MISSIONARY ATLAS PROJECT

### AFRICA

### LIBERIA

#### Snapshot Section

**Country Name:** The Republic of Liberia

**Country Founded in:** The official date of independence is July 26, 1847.

**Population:** 3,042,004 (July 2006 est.)

**Government Type:** (national, regional and local): republic. There are 30 registered political parties.

**Geography/location in the world:** Liberia lies in West Africa along the North Atlantic Ocean. Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Cote d'Ivoire all border Liberia. The climate is typically tropical and humid. During the winter, there is little rain; and the days are hot while the nights are cool. During the summer, heavy rain showers usually occur. While the terrain is mostly flat with some rolling coastal plains, there are low mountains in the northeast part of the country.

**Number of people groups:** 39

**Picture of flag:**



**Religion Snapshot:**

*Major Religion and % of population:* Forty percent of the population claim Christianity and forty percent of the population practice indigenous religions.

*All religions and % for each:*

- Indigenous beliefs = 40 %
- Christian = 40 % (Some people practice a mixture of indigenous beliefs mixed with Christian doctrines.)

- Muslim = approx. 20 %
- There is a small percentage of atheists and Baha'i.

**Government interaction with religion:** The Liberian constitution supports freedom of religion. All religious groups are treated as organizations under the current government and must register articles of incorporation as well as providing a statement of purpose. Indigenous religious groups are exempt from this requirement and usually fail to register. The registration process is fairly simple and nondiscriminatory.

## **Liberia Country Profile**

### **Basic Facts**

**Country Name:** The Republic of Liberia

#### **Demographics:**

The estimated population of Liberia is 3,042,004 (July 2006 est.) Newborns to children of fourteen years of age account for 43.1% of the total population. People between the ages of 15 – 64 years make up 54.2% of the total population. Senior adults 65 and older account for 2.8% of the total population. The median age for males is 18 years while the median age for females is 18.3 years.

The population growth rate is 4.91%. The net migration rate is 27.39 migrants for every 1,000 people. It is very important to note that due to the previous years of political unrest in Liberia that at least 238,000 refugees are still in other countries and are unable to return due to security concerns.

The birth rate for Liberia is 44.77 births for every 1,000 people while the death rate is 23.1 deaths for every 1,000 people. The life expectancy for the total population is 39.65 years, For males, the life expectancy rate is 37.99 years while the rate for females is higher at 41.35 years.

The risk of infectious diseases is very high. Some of these diseases include bacterial and protozoal diarrhea, hepatitis A, and typhoid fever. Malaria and typhoid fever are also communicable diseases that are high risks in some areas of Liberia. There are an estimated 100,000 people who are currently infected with the AIDS virus.

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/print/li.html>

<http://www.indexmundi.com/liberia/>

## Language:

The primary language of Liberia is Liberian English. About 20% of the population speaks English. Each ethnic group has different dialects and languages.

<u>Kru</u>	<u>Mande</u>	<u>Atlantic</u>	<u>Indo-European</u>
Kuwaa	Liberian Kpelle	Gola	English
Dewoin	Mende	Southern Kissi	Liberian English
Bassa	Bandi		
Gbii	Manya		
Western Krahn	Loma		
Klau	Vai		
Tajuasohn	Mano		
Sapo	Dan		
Eastern Krahn			
Northern Grebo			
Glaro-Twabo			
Glio-Oubi			
Baclayville Grebo			
Central Grebo			
Southern Grebo			

## Society/Culture

Liberian society has been completely disrupted for the last fourteen years due to the civil war. Hospitals, churches, schools, businesses, and private homes were all destroyed or severely damaged during the reign of different factional groups. Thousands of refugees fled to camps in neighboring countries or in and around Monrovia. During the last three years, all different ethnic and civic groups have begun the rebuilding process.

Life in Monrovia is very difficult. Returning refugees and former combatants are all trying to rebuild a life for themselves and their families. Jobs are often hard to come by and may pay very little. A good wage is considered about \$2.00. The government is encouraging education and rebuilding of roads and buildings, but progress is slow.

In other areas, there is tension between returning ethnic groups. For example, in Nimba County, there is much dissension right now between the returning Mandingos and the Gio and Manos. Mandingos were forced out of their homes by Taylor's forces for their suspected support of LURD. Gio and Mano families moved into the Mandingos' abandoned homes. The current Mano and Gio occupants are reluctant to leave because they feel that the homes belonged to their families in the 1960's before the arrival of the Mandingos. The government tries to solve the issue by demanding property deeds from the returning Mandingos, but because many fled from their homes quickly, they have no deeds. As each group seeks to rebuild a life, many challenges continue to occur.

Children and women are often found in perilous situations as the country seeks to rebuild. During the civil war, children were often kidnapped or forced to be soldiers for different factional groups, and women were often raped. Gang rape in Liberia was outlawed and just recently, rape has been outlawed. Currently female circumcision is still practiced among some people groups as well. President Sirleaf Johnson and the government are taking an active stance in trying to eliminate the exploitation of women and children. International Aid organizations like UNICEF and UMCOR are also working diligently to educate children and women so that they will have better economic opportunities in the future.

Family is an important part of Liberian life. Extended families usually remain very close. Polygamy has been common in the past, but the current economic situation has discouraged this practice, as most men cannot support multiple families. Traditionally, women are usually raised with the expectation that they will marry and take care of their husband and children.

Secret societies have a strong influence on the Liberian people. While the tribal chief normally has the ultimate power among tribal groups, the leaders of the secret societies (Poro for men and Sande for women) can supersede his authority. The teen-agers of different people groups will attend “bush” schools where they will learn the customs and practices of these societies. If a member of the society reveals the secret laws and traditions of the society, then he or she could be killed or banished from the tribal group. Women who join the secret society and become leaders wield enormous power. However, women that refuse to join the societies will face many social and economic problems.

Because meal preparation may take up to two or three hours, the sharing of a meal is seen as an act of hospitality. The main staple of all Liberian diets is rice. Goat soup is also considered a special national dish along with foo-foo which is a special type of bread. Slaughtering a goat in the presence of guests is considered a good sign of the family’s pride. In rural areas, eating utensils may be inaccessible so meals may be eaten by hand. At feasts, homemade alcoholic beverages may be served. Usually these liquors are very potent. Bug-a-Bug is a favorite snack. This snack contains dried and fried bugs and termites.

There are several national holidays in Liberia. Like the United States, Liberians celebrate New Year’s Day and Thanksgiving. Other national holidays include Unification Day on May 14, Independence Day on July 26, and Fast and Prayer Day on April 14.

<http://www.lingnet.org/areaStudies/perspectives/liberia/liberia.pdf>

## **Government**

From 1980 to 2003, the Liberian government has been in a time of turmoil and transition. There have been numerous coups with different leaders taking power for short periods of time. (Please see history section for detailed information.) In 2003, Charles Taylor, the leader of Liberia, formally stepped down. Later that year a final peace agreement was finally signed by the different factional groups.

For approximately two years, a transitional government that was monitored by the UN and ECOWAS held power until disarmament could take place. Finally in 2005 free democratic elections were held that were considered to be unbiased and fair by international observers.

Everyone 18 years or older could vote. Ellen Sirleaf Johnson was elected president which—under the Liberian Constitution—means that she is both the head of state and the head of the government. (The President serves for a six year term and may run for re-election.) She formally took power in January of 2006. While peace has not been officially broken for the last two years, the situation in Liberia is still considered by many to be unstable. Economic and social stability have not yet been achieved, but there is hope as the new government begins to rebuild.

The Liberian government is a republic with the capital being in Monrovia. The latest constitution was created in 1986. The Assembly is bicameral. Senators are elected through a popular election and serve nine year terms. Representatives are also elected through democratic elections and serve six year terms.

The legal system of Liberia, like many other government institutions, is in the process of being rebuilt. The Constitution provides for a judicial system with a Supreme Court and various other lower courts. The written law is based on Anglo-American common law; however, currently tribal law is also still practiced in the less developed areas of the country.

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/print/li.html>

## **Economy**

The economy of Liberia has been completely devastated by fourteen years of civil war. The World Health Organization estimates that 80% of the population lives on less than one dollar per day. Fifty-two percent of the population lives in extreme poverty. The inflation rate is 15%. The unemployment rate is at 85% while one in six Liberians depends on international food assistance to survive. Access to health care is limited.

As Liberia attempts to rebuild its economy, the fates of several different groups of people are affected. Thousands of refugees fled to neighboring countries during the conflict and now wish to return. The Refugee Act allows the refugees the same rights as foreign nationals in regards to work. They must purchase a work permit for \$150 US dollars. Yet, some refugees are still harassed at border checkpoints because they may lack identification cards. In February 2005 about 100,000 people had returned, and the UN was trying to help 300,000 more return.

Disarmed soldiers also need to be reintegrated into the national work force. Since child soldiers were often forcibly recruited by different factional groups, counseling and education programs are also needed to rehabilitate these young victims.

The national GDP based on 2005 estimates is \$2.755. Agriculture contributes 76.9% of the GDP while industry only contributes 5.4%. Other services contribute 17.7%. Liberia owes about \$3.5 billion dollars to foreign countries and investors.

Liberia has produced several agricultural products such as rubber, coffee, cocoa, rice, cassava (tapioca), sugarcane, and bananas.

Most of the industrial sector is still in ruins because of the mismanagement of Taylor's government and the flight of prominent business people. In the past, Liberia has primarily

exported lumber and rubber along with diamonds and palm oil. However, international sanctions against the sale of diamonds and lumber contribute to the economic problems.

Liberia was also an important exporter of iron ore prior to the 1980 coup, but currently is not able to process the ore for shipment. A major source of revenue for Liberia currently is the maritime registry of ships. Thirty-five percent of the world's tankers sail under the Liberian flag. Consequently, \$14 million dollars is accrued annually from the maritime registry. International investors are interested in contributing to the rebuilding process especially since Liberia may have oil reserves off of its coast.

[http://www.refugees.org/uploadedFiles/Investigate/Publications\\_ & Archives/WRS\\_Archives/2005/guinea\\_sudan.pdf](http://www.refugees.org/uploadedFiles/Investigate/Publications_&_Archives/WRS_Archives/2005/guinea_sudan.pdf)

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/print/li.html>

<http://www.who.int/hac/crises/lbr/en/>

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/6618.htm>

## **Literacy**

The literacy rate for the total population is 57.5%. The literacy rate for males is 73.3% while the literacy rate for females is only 41.6%. These are only estimates because about 80% of the schools were destroyed during the civil war. In Lofa, Gbarpolu, and Grand Cape Mount counties, the disruption to the educational system was worse.

UNICEF is currently working to develop day cares for children ages three to six and other educational programs and safe zones for children of other ages. In refugee camps, UNICEF works with displaced children to help them find missing family and to teach them methods to protect themselves against sexual abuse and molestation. The African Girls Education Initiative plays an important role in this process.

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/print/li.html>

[http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/liberia\\_2513.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/liberia_2513.html)

## **Land/Geography**

Liberia is on the West Coast of Africa. It is 111,370 sq km with land occupying 96,320 sq km and water taking up 15,050 sq km. It is geographically slightly larger than Tennessee. Monrovia is the capital city.

Liberia has 579 km of coastline on the North Atlantic Ocean. Lagoons and mangrove swamps can be found along the coastline. There are six major rivers but only one—the Farmington River—is used for commercial travel due to the sandbars and rocky rapids that are found in all of the rivers.

Further inland the terrain changes to rolling coastal plains that even rise to plateaus and mountains in the northeast. In fact, Mt. Wuteve is the highest elevation point. Liberia also has some of the greatest rainforest and evergreen forest acreage in all of Africa.

The climate of Liberia is hot and humid year round. Usually the temperature stays about 81° F. There's a nice ocean breeze along the coast that does cool the air somewhat. During the

summers, there will be heavy rainfall while the winters will usually be dryer with hot days and cooler nights. People often find that they are most comfortable wearing light cottons and linens.

Travel in Liberia is often adventurous. Roberts International airport which is 60km south of Monrovia are where all international flights currently land. Mass transit is offered to downtown Monrovia or taxis are also available. Visitors who wish to stay overnight are currently urged to stay within the city limits.

Travelers that wish to drive to Liberia find that the best roads take them through Guinea Republic and Côte d'Ivoire. However, during the rainy season, these roads become impassable. Drivers drive on the right side of the road in Liberia and may find that there are long detours around the lagoons and estuaries near the coast. Also, many of the smaller roads in rural areas are not paved or tarred. All foreign drivers are encouraged to have an international driver's license. British and U.S. citizens only have to present their licenses to purchase a temporary license from local authorities. Currently there is no bus service between towns in Liberia; however, limited boat travel is possible along river waterways.

The Sapo National Park (which covers 1380 km) is a wonderful tourist attraction. Many different species of fauna and flora may be seen as well as forest elephants, hippos, and chimpanzees.

There are many different environmental problems facing Liberia today. Deforestation and soil erosion damage the natural ecosystem on the inland. Also from December to March, Saharan harmattan winds blow across the land. Along the coast, pollution harms coastal waterways.

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/print/li.html>

<http://www.nationmaster.com/country/li-liberia/geo-geography>

<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/worldguide/destinations/africa/liberia?poi=106292>

<http://www.africa.com/dmap/Liberia/Weather+and+Climate>

## **History**

Liberia's first indigenous group was probably the Dei. While some scholars believe that the Gola were the first indigenous ethnic group, the Gola's oral traditions say that they were met by the Dei people when they first arrived. Between the 1100's and the 1500's, many different indigenous people groups arrived in present day Liberia. Some scholars divide these indigenous peoples into four main subgroups: the Mel, the Kwa, the Mande-Fu, and the Mande-Tan. (The Americo-Liberians, Congolese, and Caribbean immigrants form a fifth subgroup of ethnic peoples). The Gola and Kissi are considered part of the Mel group while the Kwa group is made up of the Dei, Bassa, Kru, Krahn, and Grebo peoples. The Mande-Fu group consists of the Kpelle, Gio, Mano, and Loma peoples, and the Mande-Tan group is comprised of the Vai, Mende, and Mandingo people groups. Portuguese sailors first made contact with the indigenous peoples as early as 1461. For the next two centuries, different Europeans traded with people groups along the coasts.

The official history of Liberia began in 1821 when American abolitionists founded the American Colonization Society in order to repatriate former African American slaves to the African Continent. With land around Cape Mesurado obtained from a Dei chieftain, the Society began sending former slaves to Liberia in 1822. The ACS faced opposition from many different groups

not the least of which were many freed African Americans in the United States who feared that the colonization efforts were simply a new attempt to expel Africans from the U.S.

Over the next several years, however, a total of twenty settlements and about 15,000 people were eventually repatriated to Liberia. Jehudi Ashmun helped found the settlement at Cape Mesurado and was highly instrumental in seeing to its continued survival. Life for the original colonists was extremely difficult due to pressure from antagonistic indigenous people groups and the threat of disease. Eventually, the capital city was founded and named Monrovia in honor of President James Monroe.

In 1841, Joseph Jenkins Roberts was elected as the first black governor, and eventually the ACS released all control of the government to the repatriates. For the next 130 years, Americo-Liberians were considered to be the socially and politically elite. In 1847, Liberia officially became an independent republic and was immediately recognized by Great Britain in 1848. France recognized Liberian sovereignty in 1852, and the U.S. recognized the Liberian government in 1862. The newly founded Liberian government ratified a constitution that strongly resembled that of the United States.

For the rest of the nineteenth century, the tiny independent republic of Liberia struggled to survive against several different internal and external threats. First of all, Great Britain and France may have recognized Liberian sovereignty; but both countries soon used different stratagems to claim areas of Liberia that had rich natural resources. Border disputes continued into the twentieth century until the U.S., France, and Great Britain finally reached an agreement in 1911.

Secondly, indigenous people groups like the Mandingos, the Kru, and the Gola also refused to recognize the Liberian government's claim to interior lands. Disputes with these indigenous peoples continued into the 1940's. Finally, economic instability plagued the Liberian government. During the 1870's, the Liberian government was forced to borrow a substantial loan of \$500,000 dollars from different European groups but then was not able to repay the debt. While Liberia had valuable exports like coffee to sell, competition from other world markets caused Liberia to be unsuccessful. This later forced the government to take out even more loans.

As Liberia entered the twentieth century, it still had economic woes. Great Britain and the U.S. both extended monetary loans to the struggling country which eventually helped to relieve the financial problems somewhat. However, both countries also demanded special privileges from the Liberia government when Liberia was unable to pay back the loans. Liberia supported the Allies during World War I, and financial stability was largely helped in 1926 by a huge investment from Firestone Tire and Rubber Company which formed rubber plantations.

Unfortunately, during the worldwide depression of the early 1930's, Liberia again had serious economic troubles, and at this time also had political woes. The League of Nations investigated allegations that the Americo-Liberian government was using the indigenous peoples as slave labor. Eventually, as a result of the League's investigation, the heads of the government resigned their posts. Apparently, there was some basis for these charges and the new Liberian government established new laws in 1936 that helped to end such practices. However,



indigenous peoples still did not have the right to vote. Firestone's continued commitment to establishing rubber plantations helped ease the economic concerns of Liberia. The building of a U.S. base during World War II and the creation of a harbor for Monrovia also helped bring better financial stability.

Politically and economically, Liberia enjoyed a time of stability and growing prosperity between the 1940's and the late 1960's. William V.S. Tubman became president in 1943 and was reelected until his death in 1971. Tubman welcomed foreign investors in Liberia, and this produced much economic revenue—especially through the development of iron ore industries. Many people liked Tubman because he welcomed international investment and worked to bring unity and equality to all of the differing ethnic groups.

Women and all property owners—whatever their ethnic background—were able to vote in 1951, and in 1958, the government passed strict anti-discrimination laws. Still, Tubman maintained tight control over the political process, and some people made accusations of unfair repression of opposing political parties in the 1955 election. In fact, there was an assassination attempt on President Tubman's life and later attempted coup d'états during the remaining years of his presidency. In all, however, Tubman was considered to be successful because of the economic prosperity his open-door policies brought to Liberia and because of the establishment of schools and roads throughout the interior of Liberia.

After Tubman's long political stint came to an end with his death in 1971, his second—in—command William Tolbert came to power. Unrest came to Liberia during Tolbert's regime in the late 1970's because of a depression in which he tried to raise the price of rice. People rioted in protest, and looting broke out. Before the violence ended, several people had been killed and the government's power was undermined. Tolbert continued to lead the government until 1980 when he was killed in a coup d'état by Samuel K. Doe, a master sergeant and rebel leader.

Doe, a Krahn, and his forces took all legislative and executive powers after the coup and even suspended the constitution. Doe promised the restoration of the government but in the 1985 election only three political parties were allowed to participate. Doe, as the head of the National Democratic Party of Liberia (NDPL), retained power as President. Many observers felt that the elections were fraudulent. Doe, being from the Krahn ethnic group, promoted many of his own people to positions of power, and his government was condemned for human rights abuses and corruption. In 1985, Thomas Quiwonkpa attempted a coup and almost succeeded, but ultimately Doe and his forces quashed the rebellion. Because Doe's government believed that the Mano and Gio people had supported Quiwonkpa, he started a persecution of these groups and any other supposed supporter of the rebels.

In 1989, Doe's reign finally came to an end due to a coup by a former Doe supporter, Charles Taylor. Taylor and his forces formed a coalition called the National Patriotic Front of Liberia and invaded from Cote D'Ivoire. For the next seven years opposing forces fought throughout Liberia. Krahn people groupsmen supporting Doe fought against Taylor and his forces who were supported by the Gio and Mano people groups that had been persecuted by Doe. Many

civilians fled their homes because of the fighting and bloodshed. An estimated 150,000 people were killed and about 850,000 people were displaced from their homes.

Soon in addition to Taylor's forces and Doe's forces, another rebel group emerged under the leadership of Prince Yormie Johnson. Johnson had originally supported Taylor but then decided to make his own bid for the presidency. Johnson eventually captured most of Monrovia and executed Doe in 1990. Taylor controlled much of the land outside of Monrovia. A remnant of Doe's forces fled to a neighboring country and reorganized into a new rebel group called United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy (ULIMO). In 1991, ULIMO invaded and succeeded in capturing parts of Loma and Bomi Counties from Taylor's forces.

In 1990, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) tried to bring order to the chaos in Liberia. ECOWAS proposed the formation of an interim government called the Interim Government of National Unity (IGNU). Eventually IGNU was formed in Gambia and Amos Sawyer became the interim leader. Over the next months, ECOWAS gained control of much of Monrovia but the countryside was still controlled by different rebel faction groups—Taylor's NPFL, Johnson's forces, and ULIMO.

While many peace accords were attempted during the next seven years, fighting continued to break out among the various factions. A coalition government was formed in 1993, but fighting soon commenced again. In 1996, Monrovia became a cauldron of seething violence as various factions and gangs fought for control of the city. International visitors had to be rescued from the violence by the U.S. Navy. Finally, in 1997 a transitional government was formed, and free elections were held. Charles Taylor was elected President with 75.3% of the vote. While international observers felt that they elections were unbiased, the other two candidates said that there were problems with the electoral process. Some felt that Taylor won simply because fighting would have broken out if he had lost.

Taylor maintained power in 1997-2003. During that time, he seemed to do little to improve the lives of ordinary Liberians as his government spent money to support fighting in Sierra Leone. Unemployment was at 75%. Due to the years of war, hospitals, schools, and other structures had been severely damaged or destroyed. Beginning in 1999, a new rebel force made up of many of Taylor's former adversaries was formed.

This new force called itself the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD). LURD invaded Liberia through Lofa County in 2000 and eventually controlled most of northern Liberia. LURD was accused of committing many atrocities in the occupied areas. Another rebel force called the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) began fighting in 2003 and soon occupied southern Liberia. Taylor remained semi-control over Monrovia and the central part of Liberia. Taylor's forces were also known to harass and torture Muslim Mandingo because of their supposed sympathy with the LURD rebel group.

In June 2003, the United Nations issued an arrest warrant for Charles Taylor. The warrant charged him with war atrocities in Sierra Leone including the use of child soldiers. On August 11, 2003, Taylor finally resigned and was exiled to Nigeria. ECOWAS deployed a force of 3600 peace-keepers and eventually a temporary cease-fire was signed between the rebel groups on

August 18<sup>th</sup>. Out of this peace accord a transitional government was formed called the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL).

Gyude Bryant was the temporary President. In October 2003, the UN assumed control of the peace-keeping forces. Finally in October 2005, new democratic elections were held and then run-off elections were held in November of 2005 with Ellen Johnson Sirleaf becoming President. Ellen Sirleaf Johnson is the first democratically elected President in Africa to be a woman.

Now the Liberian government under the leadership of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf is working with international help to rebuild war- torn Liberia. The judiciary system must be rebuilt as well as the educational system. The current government, the NTGL, has restored previously confiscated property and clearly supports religious freedom for all religious groups.

Perhaps Liberia's future hope is best summed up in these words of Ellen Sirleaf Johnson: "Let us be proud that we were able to ultimately rise above our intense political and other differences in a renewed determination as a people to foster dialogue instead of violence, promote unity rather than disharmony, and engender hope rather than disillusionment and despair."



[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_Liberia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Liberia)  
<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/shrd/2005/63944.htm>  
<http://www.answers.com/topic/culture-of-liberia>  
<http://www.encyclopedia.com/html/L/Liberia.asp>  
<http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/world/A0859267.html>  
[http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia\\_761565772\\_6/Liberia.html](http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761565772_6/Liberia.html)  
<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/6618.htm>

*Worldmark Encyclopedia of the Nations* Tenth Edition

## **Christian History**

The first missionaries to Liberia arrived with the American Colonization Society in 1822. The Providence Baptist Church was started by Lott Carey and Colin Teague. Carey and Teague were both African American missionary volunteers. Two African American Baptist societies helped with the missionary work until the Liberian Baptist Convention was formed in the early part of the twentieth century.

Southern Baptists officially started work in Liberia in 1960. They established hospitals and schools as well as a rubber farm in Bamboota. Southern Baptists also sent support to independent Baptist churches which had been started by other Baptist missionaries in earlier times. For example, Daniel Horton, an independent Baptist missionary who worked among the Bassa people, had established a network of churches that included seventy-one different congregations by 1990.

The Methodist Church also had members among the pioneer Americo-Liberian settlers but the first official church was not formed until 1833. For many years after its inception, African American bishops would come to Liberia and lead the church. The first African bishop took office in 1965. While most of the parishioners were of Americo-Liberian descent, efforts were made to establish inland missions among the indigenous peoples.

Two mission stations were established between 1925 and 1948. The Methodist church also sent missionaries to work among the Kru people. At one time, Methodists operated seventeen schools and one college. The Methodists also established other humanitarian aid programs like a hospital and leprosy center. Today the United Methodist Church through the UMCOR humanitarian organization is helping to rebuild Lofa county and also runs IDP (internally displaced person) camps in Montserrado and Margibi Counties. The Ganta hospital has also been re-opened.

The Lutheran church began work in Liberia in 1860 in the hinterland. Although there were few converts, a school system was maintained. Eventually other missions were formed. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia was founded in 1947. The mission work and the ELCL merged to become the Lutheran Church of Liberia in 1965. The Liberian Lutheran church started literacy centers, community centers, and other educational programs as well as health agencies. Most of the congregants are found in rural areas.

Pentecostal churches first sent missionaries to Liberia in 1908. They opened several mission stations in the eastern part of Liberia and successfully convinced many converts to eradicate the use of fetish charms. They established a leper colony as well as several schools and health agencies. They also began a work on one of the Firestone rubber plantations.

The Seventh Day Adventists came in 1927 and the first church was established through an evangelistic campaign in 1938. Adventists not only established a bookstore but also helped with work on the Firestone rubber plantation.

Catholics sent missionaries to Liberia as early as 1841 but their efforts were somewhat unsuccessful. In 1848 a church was open, but it closed in 1887 because of opposition. In the early part of the twentieth century, the Kru people became interested in Catholicism and later the Grebo people also heeded the call of Catholic missionaries. Eventually a good school system and three vicariates were established.

The U.S. Episcopal Church sent missionaries to begin work among the Grebo in 1836. Eventually fifty-one schools and Cuttington College were formed. Beginning around 1920, the church has sent missionaries to the northwest region of Liberia.

## **Religion**

The Liberian constitution supports freedom of religion. All religious groups are treated as organizations under the current government and must register articles of incorporation as well as provide a statement of purpose. Indigenous religious groups are exempt from this requirement and usually fail to register. The registration process is fairly simple and nondiscriminatory. The Inter-religious Council of Liberia is comprised of the Liberian Council of Churches and the National Muslim Council of Liberia.

### **Non Christian**

## *Islam*

20% or around 608,000 people in Liberia follow Islam. Islam is recording an increase of + 11.3 % per year. Some evidences of a slowing of the growth of Islam have been noted.

## *Baha'i*

Baha'i claims around .3% of the people or just under 10,000 people in Liberia

## **Christian Cults and Sects**

*Jehovah's Witness*—There are 3,565 Jehovah Witnesses in Liberia.

Liberia has many African Independent Churches. These congregations exist in a mixture of Christian teachings and practices and indigenous teachings and practices. Some observers think these groups represent an indigenous form of Christianity while others consider them syncretistic. The fact that so many Africans follow these groups indicates they have a message that appeals to Africans.

*African Christian Fellowship*—This church was begun in 1986. In 1995, the ACF had 43 congregations and 7,000 members in all. The largest congregation was found among the Kru people, but other churches had also been founded among the Bassa, Mano, and Krahn ethnic groups.

*African Disciples of Christ*—This church was founded in 1968. In 1995, there were 20 congregations with about 2,000 members in all.

*Apostolic God of Mercy Church*—This church was begun in 1957. In 1995, there were 15 churches with a total of 2000 members.

*Army of the Cross Christ Church*—This church was started around 1950. In 1995, There were 20 congregations. In all, there were 1,500 congregants. This church was started by immigrants from Ghana.

*Association of Independent Churches in Africa*—This group was founded in 1965. In 1995, there were a total of 175 churches. In all, there were 14,000 members. This group was helped by Partners International.

*Believe in God Healing Church*—This church was begun in 1960 and can be found among the Sapo people group. In 1995, there were 10 congregations. In all, there were 500 congregants.

*Bethel World Outreach*—This church was begun in 1986. In 1995, there were 35 congregations. There were about 10,000 members in all. This church believes in the gospel of prosperity.

*Church of God of Prophecy*—This church was begun in 1979. In 1995, there were two congregations and a total of 750 congregants.

*Church of the Lord*—This church was started in Nigeria in 1930 by Dr. Josiah Olunowo Ositelu, who the church today calls a prophet. This church is sometimes also called Aladura which in the Yoruba language means “owners of prayer” or the “praying people.” The Aladura church emphasizes the importance of prayer and believes in faith healing. The original members of the church came from the Pentecostal, Anglican, and Methodist denominations so different tenets of their faith reflect values of these denominations. The church condemns polygamy and witchcraft as well as the use of idols (all items from traditional African religions). The church began in 1947 in Liberia. In 1995, there were 100 congregations and 30,000 congregants in all.

*Church of God by Faith*—This church was begun in 1959. In 1995, there were 10 congregations and a total of 2,000 members. The headquarters of the church were located in Barnardsville.

*Church of the Twelve Apostles*—This church was begun in 1956. It is a part of the original Harrist Church that was begun in 1914 in Cote D’Ivoire. In 1995, there were 20 churches and a total of 3,000 members. The members were mainly from the Bassa people group.

*Fellowship of Christian Assemblies*—This church was begun around 1960. In 1995, there were 10 churches and a total of 2,000 members. The churches were mostly in southeast Liberia.

*Fire Baptized Holiness CoG of Africa*—In 1995, this church had 150 congregations and a total of 10,000 members. Churches could be found among the Kru, Bassa, and Gola people groups.

*Gethsemane Church of Liberia*—This church was founded in 1959. In 1995, there were 40 congregations and a total of 3,500 members. Churches were spread among the Bassa, Kpelle, Mano, and Gio. They support two schools.

*International Church of the Foursquare Gospel*—This church was begun in 1983. In 1995, there was 1 congregation with 30 congregants.

*Liberian Gospel Crusade Church*—This church was started in 1952. In 1995, there were 20 congregations and a total of 4,000 members. The members mainly came from the Bassa and Kpelle people groups.

*Lighthouse Fellowship of Churches*—These churches were first started in 1936. In 1995, there were 40 congregations and a total of 4,000 members. The members were mostly Americo-Liberians.

*New Apostolic Church*—In 1995, this church had 20 congregations and a total of 3,577 members. Its headquarters were in Zurich, Switzerland.

*Open Bible Standard Churches*—This church was founded in 1935. In 1995, there were 21 churches and a total of 1,830 congregants. They supported two schools, and their headquarters were at River Cess.

*Pillar of Fire*—This church was started in 1961. In 1995, there were 50 congregations and a total of 3,000 congregants. This group ran two schools, and its headquarters were at River Cess.

*Trancea*—This church was started in 1983. In 1995, there were 20 churches and a total of 9,000 members. They owned no church buildings. They just rented space in meeting halls.

*United Liberia Inland Church*—This church was founded in 1938. In 1995, there were 71 congregations and a total of 20,000 members. Church members came from the Bassa, Mano, Kpelle, and Gio ethnic groups.

### **Catholic/ Orthodox Churches**

*Roman Catholic*—Approximately 149,000 Catholics live in Liberia. There are twenty-eight diocesan priests. There are forty priests in all.

### **Protestants/ Evangelicals/ Pentecostals**

*African Methodist Episcopal (AME)* — The AME church was began in 1873. In 1995, there were 75 congregations with 13,000 members in all. The AME operated 16 schools.

*AME Zion*— This church was founded in 1876. There are 12 congregations. In all, there are 5,000 members.

*African Salvation Army Church*—This church was founded in 1964. In 1995, There were five churches, and there were 800 members in all. One of the congregations was a Bassa church that met on the Firestone plantation.

*Baptist*—The Liberia Baptist Missionary and Educational Convention has 60,000 adherents and 229 churches.

*Bafu Bay Church*—This church has Baptist roots and was begun in 1952 by a USA roadbuilder and then continued by Sapo people groupsmen. In 1995, there were 50 congregations. There were 7,000 members in all.

*Church of God (Cleveland)*—This church was begun in 1974. In 1995, there were 30 congregations and a total of 3,320 members.

*Church of God in Christ*—This church was founded around 1945. In 1995, there were 40 congregations and a total of 3,000 members. Its headquarters were in Monrovia.

*Church of God of Liberia*—This church was begun around 1970. In 1995, there were 10 congregations and a total of 3,000 members. This church is affiliated with the AWCF. The headquarters of the church were in Monrovia.

*Church of the Nazarene*—This church was started in 1990. In 1995, there were five congregations and a total of 850 members.

*Churches of Christ*—This group established work in 1966. In 1995, there were 5 churches in Monrovia, a school, and a mobile clinic. In all, there were 43 congregations and a total of 4,890 members.

*Church of the Lord Jesus Christ of Apostolic Faith*—This church was founded in 1963. It is associated with the black Pentecostal churches in the U.S. In 1995, there were 36 congregations and a total of 3,050 congregants.

*Episcopalian Church of Liberia*—This church was started in 1836. In 1995, there were 129 congregations and a total of 26,000 congregants. Congregations can be found among the Kru, Grebo, and Kissi.

*Evangelical Church of Christ*—This church was started around 1968. In 1995, there were 50 congregations and a total of 2,000 congregants. The church was started by a former ELWA radio programmer. Most of the congregants are members of the Bassa people group. Seven of the churches are in Muslim areas.

*Evangelical Churches of West Africa*—This group was begun in 1951. In 1995, there were 19 congregations and a total of 3,700 members. They ran the ELWA radio station until it was closed down.

*Evangelical Congregation Church of Christ*—This church was started in 1971. In 1995, there were 30 congregations with about 3,000 members in all.

*Free Pentecostal Church*—This church was started in 1920. In 1995, there were 30 congregations and a total of 4,550 members. The churches could be found among the Kissi, Gbande, and Loma people groups. This church also supported three schools.

*Free Protestant Episcopal Church*—This church was founded in 1957. In 1995, there were 50 churches and a total of 6,000 members.

*Liberian Assemblies of God*—These churches were first started in 1908. In 1995, there were 395 congregations and a total of 85,000 congregants. Ninety-five percent of the congregants were from the Kru people group. They supported four schools.

*Liberian Christian Assemblies of God*—This church was started in 1920. In 1995, there were 80 congregations and a total of 5,000 members. They ran the Sinoe Bible Institute and five other schools.

*Lutheran Church of Liberia*—The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liberia has approximately 71,000 congregants. There are forty parishes with fifty churches scattered through twelve of the fifteen counties in Liberia. About 90% of the church buildings were destroyed during the civil war; however, rebuilding has begun. At least six hundred congregants were killed in Monrovia



during the St. Peter's Massacre. Bishop Ronald Diggs, former President of the Liberian Council of Churches, tried to help aid in the peace accords. His successor, Sumoward Harris, has continued these efforts.

*Mary Sharp Memorial Church*—This Methodist Church was founded in 1876 and was founded by a U.S. missionary named Mary Sharp. In 1995, there were 3 congregations and a total of 1,000 members. The members were mostly from the Kru ethnic group.

*Mid-Liberian Baptist Mission*—This Mission was started in 1938. In 1995, there were 75 churches and a total of 7,500 congregants. Its headquarters were in Monrovia. Churches could be found among the Bassa, Gio, Kpelle, and Mano people groups.

*Pentecostal Assemblies of the World*—This group was founded in 1919. In 1995, there were 70 churches and a total of 70,000 members. Church members primarily came from the Kru, Dey, and Bassa peoples.

*Presbytery of Liberia in West Africa*—This church was founded in 1831. In 1995, there were 15 congregations and a total of 3,750 members. There were many women evangelists.

*Seventh Day Adventist* – This church was started in 1927. People from the Bassa, Kpelle, and Gio ethnic groups were all members of this denomination. There are 21,063 Adventists in Liberia.

*Star of Bethlehem Church*—This Anglican church was started in 1960. In 1995, there were 20 congregations and a total of 4,000 members. Most of the congregations are in Sinoe and Grand Gedeh counties. Members come from the Sapo and Kru ethnic groups.

*United Methodist Church of Liberia*—The United Methodist Church is the largest denomination in Liberia. It has 19 different districts with 450 churches. There are 320 pastors and 450 lay preachers. In all, there are 88,000 congregants.

*United Pentecostal Church of Liberia*—This church was founded in 1936. In 1995, there were 70 congregations and a total of 6,360 congregants.

*Wesleyan Church*—This church was started in 1978. In 1995, there were 15 congregations and a total of 5,270 congregants.

*World Wide Missions of Liberia*—This group was founded in 1961. There are 50 congregations and a total of 5,000 members.

### **Non Christian Sects**

For the most part the government treats all religious groups equally. Muslim groups have complained about discrimination although some Muslims hold senior government positions. Muslim complaints range from being passed over for jobs to feeling upset because the government chose to enforce an old statute where all businesses must be closed on Sunday. Since

Muslims do not believe that Sunday is a holy day, they would have preferred to have their businesses open.

Tensions had flared between the predominantly Muslim Mandingos and other ethnic groups such as the Lorma, Kissi, and Gbandi, but these have eased somewhat. Strained relations remained in Nimba County between the Gios, Manos, and Mandingos. Constraint also exists in Bong County between the Mandingos and the Kpelles. Apparently, under the government of Charles Taylor, property had been confiscated and mosques had been burned because of the supposed Mandingo support of LURD. Taylor's forces were also known to harass and torture Muslim Mandingo because of their supposed sympathy for the LURD rebel group. The current government, the NTGL, has restored previously confiscated property and clearly supports religious freedom for all religious groups. All religious and or political detainees from the Taylor government have been released, and the NTGL does not detain anyone because of their religious affiliation.

Ritual killings observed by members of traditional indigenous religious groups remain the most serious religion-related problem. Hearts, livers, and genitalia may be removed by group members called "heart men." Members of the Grebo and Krahn ethnic groups are believed to be the most common practitioners of this ritual. These ritual killings may also have been performed by faction leaders during the civil war in order to gain power over former rivals. When such a body is found, police often deem the death accidental so there is little reliable information as to the extent that ritual killings are practiced.

<http://www.nationmaster.com/country/li-liberia/rel-religion>

<http://www.nationbynation.com/Liberia/Human.html>

<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2005/51480.htm>

## **People Groups**

Akan (31,000)

The primary language of the Akan people is Akan, but the primary dialect is Fante. A secondary language is Kwawu. Fifty-three percent of the Akan are professing Christians while 7.50% are specifically identified as evangelicals. Bible translations, the Jesus Film, and gospel recordings are available. However, radio broadcasts are not available.

The Akan people can also be found in southern Ghana, the western Volta area, Togo, and Cote d'Ivoire. Traditionally the Akan were farmers if they lived in the tropical rain forest and herdsmen if they lived in the savannas. However, many of the Akan people have been migrating to larger cities to find work as well. Akan people traditionally traced their lineage through their maternal family tree; however, due to the recent upheavals and urbanization this has become increasingly difficult to do.

The first Akan society emerged around 1000 A.D., and several large empires such as the Asante Empire arose from the Akan civilization. Because gold was plentiful, the Akan people traded gold for salt and slaves. In fact, before the discovery of the New World, the Akan supplied most of the gold to Europe

**00000**

American, U.S. (34,000)

There are currently 34,000 people from the U.S. in Liberia. They speak English and 85% of them are Christians.

### **13476**

Americo-Liberian (85,000)

The primary language of the Americo-Liberian people is Liberian English. Gospel recordings are available but there are no Bible translations available. The Jesus film and radio broadcasts are also not available. The primary religion is Christianity with 34.32% of the population calling themselves evangelicals. The Joshua Project labels the church there as a widespread, well disciplined church.

The Americo-Liberians are descendants of freed slaves brought from the United States by the American Colonization Society in the 1800's. More than 16,000 of these freed African Americans settled between Robbersport and Harper. Traditionally, the Americo-Liberian people were the political, social, and economic elite. A coup d'état in 1980 overthrew the largely predominant Americo-Liberian government ending a century of political domination. Over time, the Americo-Liberians have also intermarried with other indigenous groups, and a more common term for them now is "Kwi."

### **00000**

Arab, Levantine (29,000)

The Leventine Arabs in Liberia speak a northern dialect of Levantine Arabic. They are primarily Muslim, and there are no known Christian or evangelical adherents.

### **13481**

Bassa (429,000)

The primary language of the Bassa is called Bassa. Some alternative names for this people group include: Bakem, Bisaa, Beleto, Koko, and Lowolu. The Bassa primarily live in Grand Bassa County but they also may reside in Rivercess and Montserrado counties. By the Atlantic coast, the Bassa are in the middle of several other people groups including the Kpelles, the Dans, and the Krus.

The Bassa primarily practice indigenous religions. In fact the number of Christian adherents are unknown but 43.15% of the population are evangelical. Bible translations, the Jesus film, and gospel recordings are all available to the Bassa. However, radio broadcasts are not currently reaching the Bassa.

The Bassa are mainly subsistence farmers who raise crops like cassava, yams, and plantains. Many people, though, have recently been migrating to larger cities to find better jobs. The Bassa people groups are arranged under chiefdoms with clear ethnic distinctions.

## **00000**

British (2,600)

The British in Liberia speak English. They are primarily Christians, but the number of Christian and evangelical adherents is unknown

## **13483**

Dan (150,000)

The Dan ethnic group primarily speak two languages—Dan and Upper Gio. They can be found living in Nimba County in Liberia but may also be found in Cote D'Ivoire. Other names for the Dan include: Da, Dan Yakuba, Danjia, Diabula, Gio, San Ngai, Tanka, Yacouba, Yakuba, Soisangyan, Xumin, and Yakouba.

The Dan people predominantly adhere to animistic ethnic religions. They believe in a supreme being but feel that he is unreachable by mankind. Rather they believe that a mediator called the Du which lives in the spirit of each person interacts with the supreme being. Because of the importance of this spirit that resides in each person, the Dan believe in reincarnation where the spirit can pass to other people or into animals. Like the Mende people, the Dan also have secret societies for both men and women that serve as educational units of the people group.

Some Dan people also adhere to Islam. Four percent of the people are Christian. Only .13% of the population are evangelicals. Translations of the Bible and the Jesus film are available to the Dan. Gospel recording are also accessible, but there are no radio broadcasts in their language at this time.

Socially, the Dan organize their villages under a headman who gains the position through a show of his strength as a hunter and farmer. Village elders assist this headman and control much of village life. Different clans will share gifts with each other and thus display their wealth. This gift exchange has led to an important custom called the tin tradition where men prove their worth through a display of their successes. Men may take multiple wives, and traditionally each wife would live with her children in separate huts. Today, however, a single large house with several subdivided rooms will be built with each wife and her children living in a different room.

The Dan are primarily farmers who grow various crops like rice and sweet potatoes for their own use and crops like cocoa and rubber to sell. Men also hunt and fish. Cattle, sheep, and goats are raised but are for ceremonial use. Women are usually given a specific area where they can grow their own vegetables for household use or to sell, but their primary work is to care for the children and take care of household duties. Many men now travel to larger areas to do seasonal work.

The Dan originally migrated from Mali and Guinea and became known as fierce warriors in their struggles to subdue the original ethnic people groups like the Kru. After Liberia formed a central government in 1847, efforts were made to bring peace to the Dan people and their former foes.

<http://www.uiowa.edu/~africart/toc/people/Dan.html>

<http://www.joshuaproject.net/peopctry.php?rop3=102417&rog3=LI>

**13484**

Dei or Dewoin (11,000)

The Dei people usually speak Dewoin. They primarily live in Boma County. Several alternative names for the Dei include: Anak E-de, De-gar, E-De, Ra-de, Radey, Rha-de, Edeh, Raday, Rde, and De.

The primary religion of the Dei is Christianity. Among the Dei, 3.7% are evangelical Christians. Gospel recordings are available but bible translations, audio recordings, and the Jesus film are not accessible.

Most of the Dei are farmers and live in one chiefdom. However, many also live and work in Monrovia. This group was also among the first of the indigenous groups to meet the American Colonization Society in the nineteenth century.

**13487**

Ewe (17,000)

The primary language of the Ewe people is the Ewe language. There are several alternate names for the Ewe people: Ahoulan, Ehve, Kotafon, Ebwe, Eve, and Krepi. This ethnic group may also be found in neighboring Ghana, Benin, and Togo.

The Ewe people primarily practice ethnic religions. About 12.5% of the population are evangelical Christians. The Jesus film and translations of the Bible are available. Radio broadcasts and gospel recordings can also be found.

**00000**

French (1,000)

The French in Liberia are primarily Christian and speak French. Seventy-six percent of the French are Christian adherents; however, the number of evangelical adherents is unknown.

**13478**

Gbandi, Bande (102,000)

The primary language of the Gbandi is Bandi with the primary dialect being Wulukoha. Another major language of the Gbandi is called Budik.

The Gbandi people primarily practice ethnic religions. In fact, the number of Christian adherents is unknown. About 12.5% of the Gbandi claim to be evangelical. New Testament translations are available, and audio recordings are also accessible.

**13492**

Gbii (7,400)

Another name for the Gbii is Gbee. The major language of the Gbii is Gbii. Two dialects of the Gbii language are Kplor and Dobor. In fact, the Gbii are related to the Bassa people group. In Liberia, they tend to live in Nimba County (which is in the central part of Liberia) where they are subsistence farmers.

The Gbii primarily practice ethnic religions. However, forty percent of the population are Christian with 7.50% being professed evangelicals. No bible translations or radio broadcasts are available to the Gbii. Similarly the Jesus film is not yet produced in their language. However, gospel recordings are available to the Gbii.

### **13495**

Glaro-Twabo, Krahn (4,800)

The Glaro-Twabo live in Grand Gedeh County in Liberia. They speak a Kru dialect called Glaro-Twabo. Their primary religion is Christianity. Forty-two percent of the population are Christian adherents. Only 7.5% of the population is evangelical. There are currently no Bible translations or radio broadcasts available to the Glaro-Twabo. While audio recordings are available, the Jesus film is not accessible.

### **13497**

Glio, Oubi (4400)

The Glio primarily live in the Northeastern section of Liberia. They speak a Kru dialect called Glio-Oubi. The Glio have traditionally been subsistence farmers.

The Glio primarily practice ethnic religions with only 40% of the population being Christian. Evangelical adherents only make up 7.5% of the population. There are currently no radio broadcasts or Bible translations available to the Glio. The Jesus film is also not accessible; however, audio recordings can be found.

### **13499**

Gola (137,000)

The Gola primarily speak a language called Gola which is linguistically related to the Kissi language. The Gola people predominantly live in the western part of Liberia. This people group may also be found in neighboring Sierra Leone.

Seventy-five percent of the Gola are Sunni Muslims. Less than 2% of the population are professing evangelical Christians. Portions of the Bible have been translated and some gospel recordings are also available. However, there are no available copies of the Jesus film, and radio broadcasts do not occur.

About 20% of the Gola follow traditional indigenous religions including ancestor worship. Adherents of ancestor worship believe that the spirits of dead relatives must be cared for and appeased so that the dead spirits will not turn to evil. Religious festivals include the offering of

firstfruits to the gods as well as a ceremony where the village leader will pray for rain by holding the skull of a dead ancestor and pouring animal blood over it.

Many of the Gola also believe in reincarnation. The Gola's belief in reincarnation may account for the importance of the circumcision ceremony in the life of young boys. Boys who participate in the circumcision ceremony are believed to be shedding the pollution from their old lives and becoming affiliated with the gods. After this rite of passage, boys are considered to be adults.

The Gola are now predominantly farmers. They raise yams, groundnuts, and rice. Women and their offspring will plant and harvest the crops while men will clear the land since most of the villages are found in forested areas. During the days of the Atlantic slave trade, however, the Gola acted as middle men between inland people groups and the coastal Vais.

### **13479**

Grebo, Barclayville (32,000)

The Barclayville Grebo primarily live in Grand Gedeh County in Liberia. They are also sometimes called Wedebo. They speak a dialect called Barclayville Grebo. Sixty percent of the Barclayville Grebo is Christian adherent, and 7.5% are evangelical. There is currently no Bible translation in their language. The Jesus film is also not accessible. Only gospel recordings are currently available.

### **00000**

Grebo, Fopo-Bua (16,000)

The Fopo-Bua Grebo lives in Southeast, Grand Gedeh, Maryland, and Kru Coast counties in Liberia. They speak Northern Grebo. They are predominantly Christian with 55% of the population being Christian adherents. The number of evangelicals is unknown. The Jesus film and gospel recordings are accessible. There is also a Bible translation in their language.

### **13493**

Grebo, Gboloo (75,000)

The Gboloo Grebo lives in the Eastern Province and Maryland County. They speak a dialect called Gboloo Grebo. They are primarily Christian with 48.9% of the population claiming to be Christian adherents. Only 7.5% of the population is evangelical. Gospel recordings are available; however, the Jesus film and Bible translations are not available.

### **13498**

Grebo, Globo (35,000)

The Globo Grebo lives along the eastern border of Liberia. They speak Central Grebo. They are primarily Christian with 59% of the population claiming to be Christian adherents. Only 7.5% of the population also claims to be evangelical. Gospel recordings are available, but there is no Bible translation.

**00000**

Grebo, Nitiabo (19,000)

The Nitiabo Grebo live in Southeast, Grand Gedeh, Maryland, and Kru Coast counties. They speak Northern Grebo. Sixty percent of the population are Christian adherents with only 7.5% claiming to be evangelicals. The New Testament has been translated for them. They also have access to the Jesus film and to gospel recordings.

**00000**

Grebo, Northern (93,000)

The Northern Grebo live in Southeast, Grand Gedeh, Maryland, and Kru Coast counties. Alternate names for the Northern Grebo include: Eh Je, Gbeapo Grebo, Gbepo, Klepo, and Palipo. They speak Northern Grebo. Fifty-nine percent of the Northern Grebo are Christian adherents, but only 3.5% are evangelicals. The New Testament and the Jesus film can be accessed by the Northern Grebo. Gospel recordings are also available.

**00000**

Grebo, Seaside (34,000)

The Seaside Grebo live in Eastern Province, Grand Gedeh County and Maryland County. They speak Southern Grebo. They are primarily Christian. Fifty-five percent of the population are Christian adherents but only 3.5% of the population are evangelical.

**00000**

Kissi, Southern (138,000)

The primary language of the Kissi is called Kissi. They live where the corners of Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea meet. They used to live in the Upper Niger region until they were driven out by other people groups in the seventeenth century.

Most Kissi follow traditional ethnic religions with only 9.50% of the population being identified as Christian. In fact, some of the professed Christians actually practice a mixture of Christianity and indigenous religions. Many Kissi try to use charms, sacrifices, or fetishes to ward off the distressed spirits of ancestors. Female circumcision is also practiced. Only 3.50 % of the population is evangelical Christian. Audio recordings and a translation of the New Testament are available to the Kissi.

As the Kissi moved into Liberia, Guinea, and Sierra Leone, they practiced deforestation in order to plant millet. Later, they switched to growing rice; however, the environmental problems caused by the deforestation practices of earlier centuries affected their farming ability.

Today the Kissi work in urban areas as laborers or in rural areas as subsistence farmers.

<http://www.wagateway.org/kissi.htm>

<http://www.joshuaproject.net/peopctry.php?rop3=109485&rog3=LI>

*The People of Africa* by Olson

**13507**



Kpelle (692, 000)

The Kpelle primarily live in Bong County but they also sometimes make their homes in Gibi Territory, Bomi County, and Lofa County. They now represent the largest ethnic group in Liberia. They primarily speak Kpelle.

They primarily practice ethnic religions. Professing Christians make up 12.50% of the population with 9.10% of the population being evangelical. Bible translations and the Jesus Film are available. Gospel recordings are also available; however there are no available radio broadcasts.

Oral traditions say that they can trace their heritage back to the Mali Empire which existed during the 1200's. Supposedly after the destruction of the Mali Empire, the Kpelle slowly migrated to Liberia via a southwesterly route. Today most Kpelles raise rice, millet, and peanuts.

### **13485**

Eastern Krahn (63,000)

The Eastern Krahn primarily live in the northeastern part of Liberia. An alternative name for the Krahn is the Tchien people.

The Eastern Krahn primarily practice ethnic religions. Nine percent of the Krahn population is Christian with only 3.5% of the population claiming to be evangelical. Audio recordings and the Jesus film are available. The New Testament has also been translated since 1996.

### **13532**

Western Krahn (55,000)

The Western Krahn primarily lives in Grand Gedeh County. Alternative names for the Western Krahn include Nidru or Northern Krahn. The Krahn were traditionally farmers who also used hunting and fishing to supplement their incomes.

The Western Krahn primarily practices ethnic religions. Nine percent of the Krahn population is Christian with only 3.5% of the population claiming to be evangelical. Audio recordings are available. The New Testament has also been translated since 1995.

### **13510**

Kru (234,000)

The Kru people primarily speak Klao and live in the coastal areas. Alternate names for this people group include: Cadde Loang, Chu, Cho-ru, Cru, Hma, Klao, Kru Creole, and Seyu.

Eighty-six percent of the Kru people are professing Christians while 3.5% are evangelical. Many of these Christians are also called Harrists because they follow the religious teachings of a missionary named William Harris who taught during the early part of the twentieth century.

The Kru people were excellent sailors. Even though they interacted with the European shipping trade, the people groups were hesitant to adopt new commercial and social ideas. In fact, in 1915, the Kru unsuccessfully tried to rebel against the Monrovia government.

#### **00000**

Krumen, Southern (3,900)

The Krumen speak Tepo and Krumen. They are primarily Christian with eighty percent of the population being Christian adherents. Only 7.5% are evangelicals. The New Testament is available in their language.

#### **13512**

Kuwaa (12,000)

The Kuwaa people (also known as the Belle or Kwaa) predominantly live in Lofa County near the national forest. The Kuwaas mainly speak a language called Kuwaa. They work as farmers and laborers.

Christianity is the predominant religion of the Kuwaas with 7.50% of the people professing to be evangelical Christians. Bible translations and gospel recordings are available but the Jesus film and radio broadcasts are not accessible.

#### **13515**

Loma (200,000)

The Loma people are also called the Lorma or the Loghma. They can be found in Liberia, Guinea-Bissau, and Guinea. Most of this ethnic group lives in Loma County. Their language is a derivative of the Manding language group.

They primarily practice indigenous religions. In fact, only 15% of the people are Christian adherents with only .14% of the population claiming to be evangelical. Bible translations, gospel recordings, and the Jesus film are all available to the Loma. However, radio broadcasts do not occur.

Like the Kpelle, they believe that their ancestors originally migrated from the Mali empire. They also are farmers who raise rice, millet, and peanuts. More recently, however, large numbers of the Loma have been moving to larger cities to work as wage laborers.

#### **13516**

Maninka, Mandingo (45,000)

The primary language of the Mandingos is Eastern Maninkakan. The Mandingos have several other names including Konyanke, South Maninka, Mandinka, and Wangara; however, they are primarily referred to as Mandingos in Liberia today.

The Mandingo people are mostly Sunni Muslim. Muslim traders originally brought Islam to Liberia. The Islamic leaders allowed the indigenous people like the Mandingos to mix some of their traditional beliefs with Islamic customs and beliefs. For example, ancestor worship was mixed with Islamic beliefs with the result that dead ancestors may act as spirit mediums between Allah and man. Witchcraft is also a permissible way to help heal the sick.

Only 2% of the Mandingo population are Christian adherents and only .77% are considered evangelical. Portions of the Bible and the entire New Testament are available to the Mandingos. The Jesus Film and audio recordings are also accessible.

Traditionally the Mandingos have been farmers who have grown grain crops for food and cattle for ceremonial purposes. Many, though, have also been merchants. The Mandingos are a patrilineal, polygamous society. There are clear social classes with former slaves and craftsmen being at the lowest social standing.

Today the Mandingo people are widely scattered due to the long civil unrest between different factional groups. (Please see the history section for more information.)

<http://www.joshuaproject.net/peopctry.php?rop3=106266&rog3=LI>

*The Peoples of Africa* by Olson

### **13517**

Mano (200,000)

The primary language of the Mano people is called Mann. Other names for the Mano people include Maa, Mawe, Mah, and Ngere. The Mano people have traditionally lived in Nimba county in Liberia.

The Mano people mostly practice indigenous religions—specifically animism. Only 5% of the population are Christian while .81% are evangelical. Bible translations and gospel recording are available. The Jesus Film is also accessible.

The Mano people trace their ancestry through oral traditions back to immigrants from the Mali empire. Most of the Mano raise peanuts, rice, and millet.

The Manos have also been one of the people groups that have experienced great disruptions in the recent civil unrest in Liberia. Please see the history section for more information.

<http://www.joshuaproject.net/peopctry.php?rop3=106278&rog3=LI>

<http://www.peoplegroups.org/Detail.aspx?PID=13517>

*The Peoples of Africa* by Olson

### **13518**

Manya (60,000)

The Manya live in northern Liberia near Guinea and are close neighbors to the Mandingos. They speak a Manding language called Manya.

The Manya are primarily Sunni Muslim. Traders came centuries ago and introduced the Islamic beliefs. The Manya liked Islam because they were not required to give up their traditional beliefs. For example, the Manya, while practicing Islam, may still use magic for healing purposes and divination for the appeasement of the spirits and worship of ancestors. At this time, there are no Christian or evangelical adherents among the Manya. The Jesus film is not accessible, and there is no Bible translation. Only gospel recordings are available.

The Manya are subsistence farmers who grow cotton and other grain crops. Rice is a staple food in the Manyan diet. Most often a meal with consist of rice, steamed vegetables, and some type of meat or fruit. The Manyan do keep cattle, but they are only used for ceremonial purposes and not for securing milk.

The Manya have distinct social strata with nobility and a chief that is descended from the earliest settlers of the people group. The lowest social class usually comes from emancipated slaves. Men dominate society and may take more than one wife. Entire family groups live in walled compounds together. Children are divided into groups according to their age and will do everything from work to attending school with these groups.

### **13519**

Mende (25,000)

The Mende people group primarily speaks Waanjama and Mende. Because of their linguistic and cultural similarities with the Mande people, the Mende may have migrated from Sudan between the second and sixteenth centuries. They currently live in the Guma Mende chiefdom area in Liberia, but they are also the largest indigenous group in neighboring Sierra Leone.

The Mende people predominantly practice an indigenous animistic religion which revolves around a supreme being called Ngewo. The followers of this traditional religion believe that Ngewo must be approached by using an intermediary like the spirit of a dead ancestor. Thus, witchcraft is practiced extensively. Tied to this religious practice is an educational system divided by gender. Men join the Poro society and women join the Sande society. These have been called secret societies because the members are not allowed to disclose the activities of the society to uninitiated children. Masks are used to cover the teacher of the society, and the spirit is said to inhabit the teacher while the mask is worn. This mask, called the Bondu helmet, is the only religious mask of its kind that is known to be used exclusively by women.

The number of Christian adherents among the Mende are unknown; however, 12.50% of the population are evangelicals. Bible translations are available. The Jesus Film and audio recordings are also accessible.

Sunni Muslim traders in the nineteenth century also had an impact on the Mende people. Some of the Mende converted to Islam at that time.

Most of the Mende are subsistence farmers who grow rice, cassava, coffee, cocoa, and ginger. Rice and cassava are mainly used as sustenance for the family while the other crops are sold for

profit. A large number of younger men are migrating to the cities to look for work, and thus leave a labor shortage on the farms.

The Mende people have a very interesting historical past. During the height of the slave trade, several Mende people groupsmen were sold first to a Portuguese trader and later to the joint owners of a Cuban plantation. The Cuban slave owners tried to transport the Mende people groupsmen to another part of Cuba aboard a slave ship called the Amistad. En route the Mende and other slaves mutinied and took control of the ship in hopes of being able to sail her back to Africa and freedom. Hampered by the remaining sailors, the Mende were captured by a U.S. Coast Guard vessel off of Long Island, New York. While the Cuban slave owners asserted that the Mende men were slaves and thus property, a Connecticut court pronounced them free and helped assist the Mende in getting back to their homeland.

<http://www.uiowa.edu/~africart/toc/people/Mende.html>

<http://www.chrysler.org/wom/wom0200.asp>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mende\\_people](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mende_people)

<http://www.joshuaproject.net/peopctry.php?rop3=111215&rog3=LI>

### **13523**

Sapo, Bush Kru (41,000)

The Sapo live in Sinoe and Grand Gedeh counties in Liberia. They speak a dialect called Sapo. They have traditionally been subsistence farmers.

The Sapo usually follow traditional indigenous belief systems. Forty percent of the population is Christian with only 3.5% claiming to be evangelical. Bible translations and gospel recordings are available. However, the Jesus film is not accessible.

### **13527**

Tajuasohn (12,000)

The Tajuasohn primarily live in Sino County and speak Tajuasohn. The Tajuasohn primarily practice indigenous religions. Forty percent of the population is Christian with only 7.5% claiming to be evangelical. There are currently no Bible translations available for the Tajuasohn. The Jesus film is also not available. Audio recordings are accessible to the Tajuasohn.

### **13530**

Vai (120,000)

The primary language of the Vai people is called Vai. They mostly live in northwestern Liberia and eastern Sierra Leone. In fact, the territory of the Vai covers about 7,000 square miles of Liberia. Alternate names for the Vai include Vey and Vy.

The Vai are mostly Sunni Muslim. Muslim traders arrived in the area in the eighteenth century and began to convert people group members. When slavery was abolished between 1928-1930, most of the Vai people converted to Islam.

Only about .23% of the population is evangelical Christian. The Vai have access to New Testament translations as well as the Jesus film. Audio recordings are also available. Traditional ethnic religious beliefs also influence the religious life of the Vai. For example, the Vai do believe in a supreme creator called Konga; however, they believe Konga is too distant for them to talk to directly. Rather, the Vai use a spirit medium to worship and communicate with this supreme being that controls every aspect of the physical and spiritual world. This belief in the supernatural extends to the practice of witchcraft. Some Vai believe that evil spirits are present and have the ability to curse individuals or whole people groups.

Most of the Vai people are farmers who grow rice as their staple vegetable on a plot of land until the soil becomes poor. Then, the farmers will move to a new area and burn it to clear the brush. Women and children actively participate in farm work by keeping birds and other varmints away from the growing crops and by clearing out the weeds from the crop area. Some of the Vai also are talented artisans. They create intricate weavings, wood items, and clothes. Recently, however, technology is allowing the people to have more access to other villages, imported goods have somewhat replaced these traditional items.

The Vai have three methods of schooling. Children will learn the traditional customs of the people group as well as attending an English school. Classes are also held by the local Iman so that children can learn Muslim beliefs and culture.

#### **00000**

Yoruba (14,000)

The Yorubas primarily speak Yoruba. Several alternate names for the Yoruba people group include: Anago, Ekiti, Nago, Oyo, Ljebu, Ondo, or West African. They may also be found in Sierra Leone, Ghana, Benin, Togo, and predominantly in Nigeria.

The Yorubas are 49% Christian. The number of evangelicals is unknown. Some of the Yoruba are also Muslim while others practice indigenous religions. Bible translations and the Jesus film are accessible. Audio recordings and gospel recordings are also available.

### **Missiological Implications**

1. Evangelical Christians and Churches should emphasize evangelism and church starting among the 40 % of the population who follow Traditional or indigenous religions. Definite methods for sharing the true Message of Christ should be developed and shared with the believers in Liberia.
2. Evangelical Christians and Churches should contact the leaders and members of the African Independent Churches and seek to guide them to contextualized, biblically sound teachings and practices. Overcoming the severe consequences of syncretistic teachings and practices will be difficult but the effort is imperative
3. Evangelical Christians and Churches should seek ways to meet the many social and physical problems in Liberia. Sharing the Love of Christ through loving acts will aid the sharing of the Gospel of Christ

4. Evangelical Christians and Churches should seek to minister to the many people in Liberia who have suffered in the long civil wars and seek to help overcome the strife between the ethnic groups in the country. The children of Liberia have suffered cruelty during the wars and stand in desperate need of ministry. Thousands of these children have been forced to participate in the fighting.
5. Evangelical Christians and Churches should seek to minister to families in Liberia. These family groups have been disrupted and traumatized in the strife of the past years.
6. Evangelical Christians and Churches should seek believers from other nations who would be ready to enter Liberia as evangelists and church starters.
7. Evangelical Christians and Churches should seek persons who would invest in business ventures in Liberia. These ventures would provide jobs and development for the people.
8. Evangelical Christians and Churches should pray for God's leading of the people of Liberia so as to overcome the difficult social and political stresses the people confront.
9. Evangelical Christians and Churches should be mindful that many who are classed as Christian are questionable as to salvation because of the many Independent Churches and other syncretistic factors.

Life in Liberia is obviously very hard and difficult right now. Not only are there many displaced persons due to the civil war, but also churches and businesses have been destroyed. There are many different international aid groups that attempt to help refugees reintegrate into Liberian society. These groups offer a good chance for evangelism.

While the tenets of Christianity have been absorbed by different people groups, a syncretism of ethnic religions and Christianity or Islam can still be found. As missionaries attempt to teach and evangelize different people groups, an awareness of the influence of the secret societies and indigenous folk religions is needed. Liberians who become Christians in areas where Christianity is not prevalent or where there is a syncretism between traditional religions and Christianity may face severe admonishment or abandonment by their family or tribal group.