

## **LIBERIA NEEDS OUR HELP NOW MORE THAN EVER**

by Tarma Johnson  
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In this second edition of our newsletter, the Rural Liberian Healthcare and Development Initiative (RLHDI) would like to share with you some historical highlights of Liberia, our vision for the children of Liberia, and the efforts being pursued by our organization to help make their lives better.

We have previously spoken about the 14-year civil war that has set Liberia back for many years, when comparing it to other countries. You may be thinking of the many countries on the continent of Africa that need help so “Why Liberia”? Yes, there are many African countries that need help, and there are many people who are working so diligently to make a difference in many other countries, but we Americans, especially African Americans, have an indisputable historical connection with this small country of 3.5 million people.



Liberia is the only African country that was not colonized. Liberia was recognized as a republic in 1822. History tells us that many slaves that left the United States after receiving their freedom went to Liberia. Over 20 Presidents of Liberia were Americans. This clash of indigenous and resettled Liberians was good and bad for the country. For many years, the people struggled to live together despite their cultural differences. These differences continued throughout Liberia's history and contributed to the civil unrest that became a

devastating 14-year war that left over 250,000 people dead and the country's economy ravaged.

During World War II, Liberia was an ally of the United States in its war with Germany. According to an article from [africawithin.com](http://africawithin.com), Liberia played a crucial role in the war effort. Liberian territory was used by United States and British military forces to ferry American soldiers. Liberia was the only source of natural rubber for the Allies. Japan occupied the rubber producing areas in the Far East.

In January 1943, President Franklin D. Roosevelt visited Liberia and had some key issues to discuss with the Liberian leaders. One issue was to reaffirm Liberia's commitment to continue supplying the United States with natural rubber and another was to expel all German citizens from Liberia, despite the fact that German merchants ran the Liberian economy. Germany was Liberia's major trading partner and most doctors in Liberia were Germans. Liberia was in a difficult position, but willingly agreed to expel the German residents and declare the full might of the Liberian economy against Nazi Germany and the Axis.

Liberia's strategic position was very beneficial to the US. A New York Times article in 1994 showed how the US military moved thousands of soldiers and war supplies from the United States to Liberia. The men and supplies were taken to North Africa by way of Miami, through Central America to Brazil, then to Liberia. This influence on the Liberian economy had a positive effect on the Liberian state and the indigenous class of Liberians who lived in the provinces. Liberia eventually converted its money from the British pound sterling to the US dollar.



The booming economy started a massive migration of the indigenous Liberian people from the interior to the coastal region in search of work. The indigenous people and their families received social and economic benefit by way of health care and public school education for the children. They did have to pay a "hut tax" to receive these benefits. The hut tax was a type of taxation introduced by British colonialists in Africa on per hut or household basis. It was variously payable in money, labor, and grain or stock and benefited the colonial authorities in two ways: it raised money; and it forced Africans to labor in the colonial economy.

Again, you may ask, "Why Liberia"? The Rural Liberian Healthcare and Development Initiative (RLHDI) has chosen Liberia for several reasons: (1) the organization's founder and other Liberians in RLHDI have experienced the civil war first hand and have family members who died during the war. (2) as a people, we cannot solve everyone's problems, but if some who have a little would help those who have nothing, what a wonderful, peaceful world this would be!, (3) the children of Liberia are suffering - 250,000 children in a country of 3.5 million people are orphans and over 500,000 do not attend school. We believe that if we undertake a project that would help alleviate some of the difficulties Liberians are going through, we would have made a footprint for others to follow not only to help Liberia, but also other countries that genuinely needed assistance.

One of our main objectives is to work with the nation's educational system, the Ministry of Education, to raise the literacy level of the children by providing books and building resource rooms in the already established schools. This will allow the teachers to have multiple copies of books for children to read together. The rooms will be available for children who have an innate interest in reading and do not need to be encouraged to pick up a book.

Now I hope you are asking yourself, "How can I help?" You can help us by providing a financial contribution of any kind. Today, we are in an economic struggle in this country, but many of us are still able to donate \$1, \$5 or \$10 and even more without breaking our budgets. We are also asking for those who can to donate slightly used books, recent text books (published 2000 or later), reading books, fiction and non-fiction, Bibles or medical journals.

**EDUCATION CAN REBUILD A NATION!**