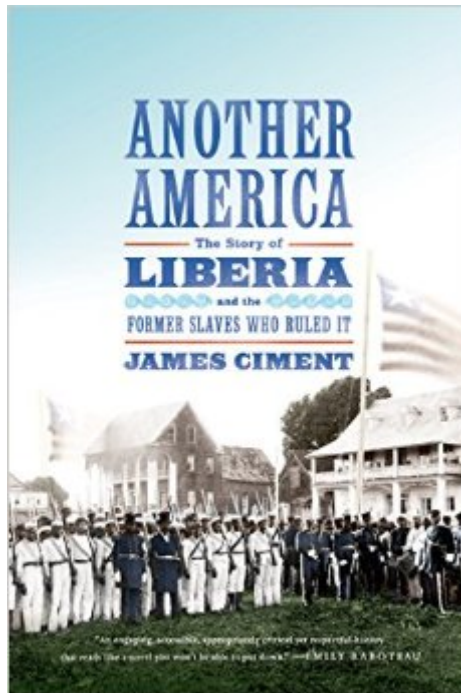


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Another America: The Story Of Liberia And The Former Slaves Who Ruled It



Synopsis

The first popular history of the former American slaves who founded, ruled, and lost Africa's first republic. In 1820, a group of about eighty African Americans reversed the course of history and sailed back to Africa, to a place they would name after liberty itself. They went under the banner of the American Colonization Society, a white philanthropic organization with a dual agenda: to rid America of its blacks, and to convert Africans to Christianity. The settlers staked out a beachhead; their numbers grew as more boats arrived; and after breaking free from their white overseers, they founded Liberia—Africa's first black republic—in 1847. James Ciment's *Another America* is the first full account of this dramatic experiment. With empathy and a sharp eye for human foibles, Ciment reveals that the Americo-Liberians struggled to live up to their high ideals. They wrote a stirring Declaration of Independence but re-created the social order of antebellum Dixie, with themselves as the master caste. Building plantations, holding elegant soirees, and exploiting and even helping enslave the native Liberians, the persecuted became the persecutors—until a lowly native sergeant murdered their president in 1980, ending 133 years of Americo rule. The rich cast of characters in *Another America* rivals that of any novel. We encounter Marcus Garvey, who coaxed his followers toward Liberia in the 1920s, and the rubber king Harvey Firestone, who built his empire on the backs of native Liberians. Among the Americoes themselves, we meet the brilliant intellectual Edward Blyden, one of the first black nationalists; the Baltimore-born explorer Benjamin Anderson, seeking a legendary city of gold in the Liberian hinterland; and President William Tubman, a descendant of Georgia slaves, whose economic policies brought Cadillacs to the streets of Monrovia, the Liberian capital. And then there are the natives, men like Joseph Samson, who was adopted by a prominent Americo family and later presided over the execution of his foster father during the 1980 coup. In making Liberia, the Americoes transplanted the virtues and vices of their country of birth. The inspiring and troubled history they created is, to a remarkable degree, the mirror image of our own.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Author James Ciment tells the history of Liberia starting with the 1820 arrival of its first colonists on the Elizabeth. He gives interesting background on the settlers and their reasons emigrating from the US to the new country, Liberia. He shows that like the US, itself, the country had to wrested from the natives that had controlled it to date. The narrative shows how the tensions of this past affected each successive generation up to the present time. The history is told in a series of episodes. While each is interesting and unique some of the early ones seem incomplete and not well tied together. For instance, the leap from starving colonists to a thriving community is not described very well. There are more specifics on a meeting in Germany where the map of Africa is determined, than there is on how Liberia actually lost land to France and England. Four pages are devoted to the travels of Benjamin Anderson and the challenges to his reports. It appears that Liberia's claim to interior land was based on Anderson's exploration. The implication is that the challenge to the reports allowed France to take these lands, but how this was done is not explained. The post WW2 narrative is the best, most likely reflecting the availability of more sources. Ciment notes that very little of the historical record survives in Liberia making the US the location of most primary sources. This book will appeal to general readers with an interest in slavery and/or Africa. The overall story of this country struck me as being very important to the study of sociology. How is it that those who fled slavery built a prosperous life by re-instituting it? What were the factors that created oppressors from the oppressed?

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