

**INDEPENDENCE DAY ORATION, DELIVERED ON JULY 26, 1944  
AT THE  
CENTENNIAL PAVILION IN MONROVIA**

By Didwho Twe

**Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen:**

Amongst mankind, whether in the lower or in the highest stages of development, the necessity for the protection of the interests of the state, that is, the interest of the masses who constitute the state, is always invariably translated into creed which admits of no questioning and no arguments whatever. It is the doctrine on which society and governments are built. On its strength governments become responsible for the life and happiness of every member of society, and therefore enact laws not only to direct and to control the actions of man to man so as to give freedom and equal justice to all but also to punish their violators. Thus the welfare of the masses become the supreme concern of all governments consequently irrespective of their underlying motive, except in extreme cases, courts do not generally pass upon the constitutionality of acts committed in the name of the state by the ruling classes within the nation, for the implicit confidence that every act of theirs is designed to safeguard the interests of the people who in the final resort constitute the state. But this confidence shall on no account be abused, and the people shall not suffer in the hands of their own government. This is the greatest of all the commandments "on which hang all the laws and the prophets." There is no mercy on earth or in the heavens above for its violators, they are never allowed to go free. Governments and society are controlled not only by laws but mainly by public opinion. When public opinion comes, therefore to sum up the record of each administration success is not gauged by exceptions nor by rise of revenue, for every rise in the revenue increases the burden of the consumer; nor by erection of costly buildings, but rather by the results of its policies on the spirits of men: whether or not under its influence the people have advanced in industry, in knowledge and in wealth; or whether they have hopelessly declined in courage and manliness, those qualities which are necessary and requisite to produce a vigorous nation.

The same rigid test will be applied to plumb the rectitude of this and subsequent administrations. Being an African State ruling Africans in Africa, the world expects colonial administrators to come to Liberia to drink at its fountain of perfect African administration. America and the American Government -- founder of the Republic -- has special solicitude for its success. This anxiety is the background of the occasional friendly inquires into our internal policy, which we call meddling interference in our private affairs. But the America of today is not the America of yesterday.

While I am not today concerned with discussion of the native question, I wish to make this brief observation. We cannot but concede that there is a general

dissatisfaction amongst the aboriginal population throughout the Republic. The continual migration of the natives in large numbers into British and French colonies; leaving countless number of broken towns behind, is nothing but passive expression of their disappointment. But it must be clearly understood that the unhappiness of the native population is a legacy handed down by previous administrations for the six-month old Tubman is in no way responsible. The healing of the deep wounds which have been inflicted and the comforting of the remnant of the disappointed population is the task of the present administration.

In 1926 I delivered the Newport Day address (*Italics are mine – Nyanseor*) for that year right in this very hall, but on that day I went against my conviction. The task was therefore a very uncomfortable one to perform, for I have always felt that the continual celebration of the destruction of men of the Bassa Tribe by Matilda Newport is a short sighted policy to sustain. It invites ill feelings from within and criticism from without. The outside world would feel, and rightly so, that is radically wrong in Liberia where, one brother fires canon in celebrating the day he was successful to kill the brother.

What sort of unity do we really expect to establish? Nevertheless, I delivered the oration. It was my first public address but it landed me in the National Legislature the following year as member from Montserrado County.

Unfortunately, I acted very "unwisely" in the Legislature as I did in 1912, when I was District Commissioner on the Anglo-Liberian Border\*. Instead of dancing to the popular music, I took a position and made a speech that was not acceptable to the powers that be. I was looked upon as a dangerous character and was therefore promptly expelled from the Legislature. I was not disappointed and kept malice against no one for the reprisal. But I never understood the real reason for my expulsion till I read the statement of a distinguished Liberian statesman. On the 25th of January, 1932, the Liberian Secretary of State, the Honorable L. A. Grimes now Chief Justice of the Republic, made the following statement before the Council of the Leagues of Nations, which statement is now a part of the records of that International Body:

"In 1929 the Honorable D. Twe who is a Kruman by birth, and was then a member of the National Legislature, discovered that some laborers were about to be shipped out of the country against their will. He appealed to Mr. Barclay, President Edwin Barclay, who took over from C. D. B. King, who promptly took actions that interrupted the proposed shipment. Mr. Twe was soon expelled from the Legislature under the circumstance which strongly suggested that his expulsion was arranged as a punishment for having been responsible for interrupting the shipment".

"It is this Mr. Twe whom President Barclay has nominated, and the Senate has confirmed for the post of Secretary of the Interior, that post in the Government

which more than any other one has to do with the aboriginal population, of whom Mr. Twe is one, and whose cause he has championed on several occasions".

It is true that I have championed the cause of the auto-chthonic races on many occasions as Justice Grimes said, but as will be seen by record in our State Department, I have vigorously championed the cause of this Government against the French and the British on the boundary, and had regained territories considered lost to Liberia long before I undertook to champion the cause of the aboriginal population. But my countrymen did not understand that the position I took in the Legislature was neither malicious nor political, not was the first time I took such position. It was merely a continuation of a principle.

**\*League of Nations: C/Liberia/P.V.6 page 11.**

On the Anglo-Liberian border, I called upon Dr. John Crawford Maxwell, the British Provincial Commissioner, who was the embodiment of the British justice and humanity, to free and deliver and deliver to me all Liberian natives who had been captured in tribal wars by people of the Sierra Leone Protectorate before the two governments entered the interior. Similarly I gave undertaking to free and hand over to Dr. Maxwell all natives of Sierra Leone who had been likewise captured by our people and were held in slavery by chiefs and other persons on the Liberian side. In the first two months I collected, freed, and delivered to Mr. Maxwell 2,386 men and women with all their children without compensation to the owners. This aroused serious opposition on the part of Mabu Vonjo who, being a professional slave dealer, could not appreciate the benefits of such a policy and consequently started to organize a plot to fight rather than to release the British natives to return to their home. But when on my first few trips to the British side on this particular mission, I repatriated 6,721 Liberian citizens and returned them to their people, all the chiefs became happy and opposition broke down. Not included in the above figure were large numbers of people on both sides of the boundary who, when they heard about the orders posted, left their places of servitude and returned to their homes. We continued this work for one year, but the figures indicated that there were more Liberians in servitude in the Sierra Leone Protectorate than there were British subjects in slavery in Liberia. His Excellency President Daniel E. Howard reported this incident to the National Legislature on page 14 of his Annual Message dated December 12th, as follows:

"The latest information from our Anglo-Liberian Boundary tells of the formation of a secrete combination against the Government, which was occasioned by the attitude of our Commissioner Twe, an efficient and competent young man of the Kru Tribe, who would not countenance the selling of persons by a certain influential chief, and who moreover, was exerting himself successfully, with the assistance of the British authorities, to get back into Liberian territory many chiefs and people who had been sold or forced to flee for refuge on the British side of the boundary. Dispatches of a later date, however, just received, tell of the settlement of those intrigues".

When I received the President's esteemed letter asking me to be the speaker today, I began to wonder what would happen this time for each of the two public speeches I have made here has a special history of its own. But life is surrounded by mysteries, which are only explicable, by experience.

**Fellow Citizens: I shall speak briefly on the subject:**

### **THE FUTURE IN LIBERIA**

But since there is a great difference between the future of Liberia and the future in Liberia, I want it to be understood that I am not going to discuss the future of Liberia, because in the face of the rapid changes now taking place everywhere no one can undertake such a task without being forced to apologize for his conclusions.

**EDUCATION**---In considering the future in Liberia the first item that comes up one's mind is education. The greatest indictment against the Republic today is that the governing classes have studiously prevented the education of the masses and have also kept them dependent; and that it is for this reason that ninety- nine and half percent of the people are illiterate. Whether this indictment is true or not, I can not say, but it is the opinion of majority of our critics and they have to their opinion. All I have to say is, no nation has ever been able to establish and maintain a strong government with a poor ignorant population. Much of our progress in the future will depend upon the rapidity with which we mass educate our people now.

In spite of China's struggle to survive under the heel of the conqueror, her mass education program is turning out one million students annually out of high schools. This report from backward China should be an inspiration to us.

**AGRICULTURE**---The second and most vital point in the future in Liberia is agriculture. The nation is now facing conditions hardly distinguishable from famine, not for the lack of many agricultural products, but for one staple diet only--Rice.

The greatest question in the country today is---What is the basic cause for the shortage of rice? The answer to this question lies in the investigation of our population. During the past century someone conjectured that the population of Liberia was two and a half million. From that time up to the present we have tenaciously held on to this figure without investigation and without making allowance for increase or decrease. That is, the number of our population has been stationary for more than fifty years. This is incompatible with the law of population, unless the state of our agricultural development has reached the point of diminishing return.

The naked truth of the matter is Liberia does not possess the population she thinks she has. This fact was not revealing to the public till the passage of the law prohibiting the importation of rice into Liberia. This revelation renders necessary revision of our "Alien Residence Act" requiring the payment of \$50.00 annually by every alien, to admit immigrants freely into the country to compensate for the shortage. The present population of Liberia is not much over one and a quarter million if at all. This statement is based on the number of actually inhabited towns in the whole of the Western Province, which was once considered the most populated part of our hinterland. Indeed the insufficiency of population is one of the knotty problems the present government must prepare to face at no distant date. The shortage of rice, if carefully analyzed, can be largely attributed to shortage of population in the interior plus other factors. But this is a question I cannot go into detail without reviewing our native policies from the administration of Arthur Barclay to that of Edwin Barclay inclusive and without digressing too far from my main purpose.

After years of traveling throughout the interior and the coast and after well-matured consideration of conditions everywhere, I am thoroughly convinced that the inauguration of a well organized compulsory agricultural scheme, such as the herein suggested, is exactly similar to compulsory education which policy has been adopted by all advanced governments; the former is intended to free the individual from poverty and raise him to a state of economic independence for the benefit of himself and the state; the latter for the benefit of the state and of him whose mind is developed. But at all events, this compulsory agricultural policy must be a revolution by consent not by force.

**INDUSTRY & CAPITAL**---I come now to the third point---Industry and Capital. Though we may escape the ravages of this global conflict, yet we cannot escape the inevitable invasion for raw materials. This is the war that Liberia must prepare herself to face. It will be as aggressive as a war of cannon and bombs, for the world will no longer respect the right of any nation over vast raw materials which it cannot develop, but which it refused to release for the advancement of civilization.

Coupled with this is the fact that the development of our vast resources requires skill and capital, which we have not. We must therefore for the moment depend upon foreign capital for the development of our country. But in admitting foreign capital into the country for the exploitation of our resources, no monopoly should be granted to any one nation against the interest of other nations. Furthermore, capital, when once invested in the country for the economic betterment of the state and people, should be given hearty cooperation and adequate support with due regard to protect the interest of the masses.

Three classes of people are primarily and vitally concerned in the development of any country. namely: the workman or producer,--in Liberia the native man,--the capital and the Government. Without these three factors the equation is

unbalanced. Government being a non-productive organization, depends wholly on the producer and the capitalist for its existence but with legislative and judicial powers in its hands, it can, at any time, create impossible conditions for both producer and capitalist. But Government cannot carry its coercive powers to the extreme in this direction without paralyzing the industry. Because of the lack of understanding of economic laws common among Statesmen, enactments detrimental to the life of industry are often hastily passed into law. It has become the business of producers and capitalists therefore, to protect themselves, to use their means and influence to prevent the passage of such laws. This legitimate struggle for existence on the part of capitalists has been interpreted as an attempt to control Government, hence the eternal conflict between governments and capitalists in highly industrialized countries. But these reactions are inevitable in the industrial development of any country.

Liberia democracy is in jail. We have placed all sorts of barriers around the Country to shut out capital and foreigners but shutting out capital and foreigners, in this way, we have imprisoned ourselves within; consequently our democracy is in prison and we ourselves have been in prison for nearly one hundred years. The result has been loss of manhood, illiteracy, poverty and the want of the worst kind. These barriers must be broken. We can no longer afford to keep this country forever closed to foreign capital. Liberia must be developed. It is impossible for us to advance to mass education and adequately feed our population without developing the country.

## **CONCLUSION**

As the sun rises in the east and sets in the west, so the great revolutionary forces which have influenced the progress of mankind have always come from the east and marched westward, but never from west to east, nor from the north to the south. The ancient civilization of Africa marched from Egypt to the West. "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" Said the three wisemen. And from the east Christianity marched westward. When Mohammed lifted his sword he pointed it to the west and Mohammedism marched from the east to the west. The Pilgrim Fathers planted Anglo-Saxon civilization on the North American Continent not in the north, nor in the west, nor in the south but in the end from east. American civilization and American democracy marched westward. To fulfill her destiny, Liberia must turn her back to the east and march westward.

I thank you.

**NOTE:** I (Siahyonkron Nyanseor) owe special thanks and appreciation to both of my cousins, Rev. Blamo Nyeatue Seekie and Robert Wesley Jusu for passing onto me this valuable document. It was Rev. Seekie who first shared Twe's speech with me. It was in the 1980's, but several sheets of the speech were misplaced. It wasn't until Robert provided me with the complete text (**Taken from Siahyonkron Nyanseor's Liberian History Archive**).