

NAME:

BLOCK:

NATIONAL HISTORY DAY PROJECT
ASSIGNMENT #12



DUE DATE:

HISTORICAL CONTEXT TIMELINE

DUE DATE: JANUARY 8TH (JANUARY 9TH FOR D & E BLOCK)

ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTION:

One feature of a high quality historical research project is the essence of total clarity. A sign of successful historical research occurs when the reader is able to read the research with a full understanding of the landmark events and historical context in which the subject at hand occurred. This is largely achieved by the work of the author who prefaces the historical research with an extremely clear and laid out picture of the historical context.

Often times, this clear understanding of the historical research is set by a background paper or historical context essay. To further the essence of clarity and awareness of the landmark events surrounding an historical topic, an *historical context timeline* can be rather effective.

For this assignment, you will be creating an *historical context timeline* that maps out the landmark events that are crucial to the telling of your topic. This should not be more than 1 page, typed and single spaced. This timeline should trace the landmark events noted in your historical context essay. The timeline, essentially, is an outline form of your essay. There should be no landmark events in the timeline that are not expressed in the essay. If you realize that you are missing an essential landmark event in your essay, be sure to include that event in ***both*** your essay and your timeline.

On the following page is a former student's Historical Context Timeline AND Essay. Note how the information in the timeline is mirrored in the essay.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT TIMELINE

Leadership in Ending Liberia's Civil War: Leymah Gbowee

1821 - Motivated by the domestic politics of slavery and race in the United States as well as by U.S. foreign policy interests, the state of Liberia is founded, becoming the second black republic in the world.

1830's - Based on the system of racial segregation in America, the Americo-Liberians recreated a cultural and racial caste system with themselves at the top and indigenous Liberians at the bottom. The Americo-Liberian elite's historical oppression against indigenous Liberians include: denying citizenship, denying full voting rights to; lack of property rights, and a system of forced labor.

1840's - Americo-Liberians form the True-Whig Party and dominate Liberia's political system

1890's - Hard-pressed to defend its economic interests from malevolent foreign intervention and embattled with domestic conflict, Liberia's ability to sustain itself as a vibrant economy begins to falter.

1904 - Indigenous Liberians are finally granted citizenship to Liberia after 60-70 years of oppression. The True-Whig Party firmly remains in power, despite the new class of citizens.

1914 - 1945 - The world endures two world wars over 30 years, interrupting long-held power structures

1945 - The United Nations is created as a result of the two world wars between 1914 and 1945 serving as a watchdog agency for human rights violations committed around the world.

1950's - Liberia begins to modernize with American assistance while the True-Whig Party remains steadily in power, continuing its divisive rule against indigenous Liberians

1972 - Leymah Gbowee is born in Liberia's capital of Monrovia

1980 - Samuel Doe, a Liberian of indigenous Liberian ancestry overthrows the True Whig Party in a military coup with the help of a North-American educated Liberian, Charles Taylor.

1989 - Charles Taylor returns to Liberia as the head of a Libyan-backed resistance group, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) and overthrows the Doe regime, beginning what becomes known as the Liberian Civil War, fought between the NPFL & the United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy (ULMO).

1990's - The Liberian Civil War rages on with widespread death & disease.

1996 - Leymah Gbowee begins a career in social justice, counseling victims of the on-going Liberian Civil War

2001 - Leymah Gbowee works with ex-child soldiers of the 20 year old Liberian Civil War

July, 2002 - Leymah Gbowee is recognized as spokeswoman and header organizer of protests against Charles Taylor's resistance to ending the Liberian Civil War. Protests and strikes remain steadily in place under the organization of Leymah Gbowee.

August, 2003 - Charles Taylor resigns and goes into hiding until his arrest in 2006, where is placed on trial for crimes against humanity under the order of the United Nations.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT ESSAY

Leadership in Ending Liberia's Civil War: Leymah Gbowee

Little did Liberia know of the havoc that waited after a group of soldiers entered Liberia's capital of Monrovia on Christmas Eve in 1989 to overthrow the military dictatorship of its current ruler. Almost 14 years would pass until Liberia began to see a small trace of the stability that the country once endured in a previous period. The U.S. originally founded Liberia, a country in West Africa bordered by Sierra Leone to its west, Guinea to its north and Ivory Coast to its east, in the early 19th century. Initially, Liberia was thought to be the panacea for the broken race relations within the United States. The thinking was simple: send recently freed slaves living in America back to Africa so that they can have a place devoid of racial discord. At first, the plan appeared to be effective for recently freed slaves returning to their ancestral origin. However, by the late 19th century, Liberia's ability to maintain any economic vibrancy began to slowly fade. Ethnic tensions between the indigenous Africans and those with origins in America began to rise as a system of slavery practiced in the United States began formed with the American-Africans in positions of power, and the indigenous Africans in forced servitude. The country soon began its crawl to a period of division and conflict characterizing the latter half of the 20th century. By 1989, Liberia found itself at the beginning of a long period of extreme violence and entered into a long and bloody Civil War. Costing the lives of over 250,000 people, the Liberian Civil War finally ended 2003. While political peace has come to Liberia, many question whether the carnage of the Civil War would still be raging if it were not for the leadership of one woman: Leymah Gbowee (Schwarz, 1997).

Leymah Gbowee was no stranger to the ethnic issues that plagued Liberia. Born in central Liberia on 1 February 1972, it wasn't until Leymah was 17, when the Liberian Civil War erupted in 1989, throwing the country into bloody chaos until its temporary ceasefire in 1996. During the ceasefire, Gbowee learned about a program run by the humanitarian program known as UNICEF, where individuals like herself could be trained to become social workers counseling those traumatized by war. Eventually, Leymah ended up taking part in a three-month training experience, beginning an interest in pursuing a career social justice. Gbowee wrote of her training experience stating, "I could feel my mind expand, my comprehension deepen" (Gbowee, 93-105)

Continuing on with her college work in 2001, Gbowee applied her knowledge and training in trauma healing and reconciliation to rehabilitating some of the ex-child soldiers who were forced to fight in the Liberian Civil War that had been raging throughout Liberia since 1989. Surrounded by the images of war, she realized that "if any changes were to be made in society it had to be by the mothers" (Gbowee, 121). Gbowee then engaged in the next chapter of her life's journey - rallying the women of Liberia to stop the violence that was destroying their children.

By the summer of 2002, Gbowee was recognized as the spokeswoman and inspirational leader of the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace, described as a peace movement wherein women of Christian and Muslim backgrounds prayed for peace, using Muslim and Christian and held daily nonviolent demonstrations and sit-ins in defiance of orders from the tyrannical president at that time, Charles Taylor, the man responsible for beginning and prolonging the Liberian Civil War.

The Liberian Civil War was no small issue facing the people of Liberia. By 2001 the Civil War had been raging on for more than an entire decade with very little interruption. The conflict stretches back to the country's ethnic and political origins in the mid 19th century. The African-Americans who relocated from the United States in the 1820's later became known as Americo-Liberians. This ethnic group went on to start a political party, the True Whig Party, whom would dominate Liberian politics for the next 130 years, marginalizing indigenous, non-Americo-Liberians in the process, and furthering a divide between Liberians of American and African descent, and those of only African descent. In 1980, an indigenous Liberian by the name of Samuel Doe overthrew the True Whig Party in a military coup, killing the current True Whig Party. It was precisely this moment in Liberian history wherein the political stability of Liberia began to crumble. After nine years of Doe's harsh tactics against any suspicion of opposition to his regime, Liberia witnessed the savage overthrow of Samuel Doe by his former ally, Charles Taylor, as well as the beginning of a savage period of economic, political, social and moral turmoil. (Wreh, 150-165).

Once in power, Charles Taylor and his military regime, known as the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), began its enduring period of fighting the overwhelming amount of opposition, despite allegedly fraudulent victories in Liberia's presidential elections. The bulk of Taylor's opposition that characterized the Liberian Civil War was from the group known as the United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy (ULMO). The Civil War was brutally fought on both sides. Taylor's military forces are alleged to have used rape and drug use as tactics for warfare, while opposition forces met Taylor's tactics with equal brutality and inhumanity. Fighting ravaged the country's economy, sending it into a well of poverty and rampant disease (Ellis, 204)

It was the decline of political stability and perpetual warfare that most significantly impacted the livelihoods of Liberia's civilians, especially that of Leymah Gbowee. Reflecting on the carnage cultivated by the Civil War, Gbowee wrote,

“In the moments we were calm enough to look around, we had to confront the magnitude of what had happened in Liberia. Two hundred and fifty thousand people were dead, a quarter of them children. One in three were displaced, with 350,000 living in internally displaced persons camps and the rest anywhere they could find shelter. One million people, mostly women and children, were at risk of malnutrition, diarrhea, measles and

cholera because of contamination in the wells. More than 75 percent of the country's physical infrastructure, our roads, hospitals and schools, were destroyed”(Gbowee, 12).

With rape used as a military tactic, women were in extraordinary positions of opposition. After an entire decade of savage brutality, perpetual warfare and acrimony all in the name of political divisions stemming from broken ethnic relations that traced back to an entire century earlier, it is of little wonder why Liberia's civilians were fed up and ready to organize a movement against the oppressive rule of Charles Taylor. Having been introduced to Samuel Gbyadee, the leader of West Africa's first regional peace organization, the *West Africa Network for Peace* (WANEP), Leymah Gbowee was called to help organize an all-woman organization designed for cultivating peace within the war-torn Liberia. The organization became known as the *Women in Peacebuilding Network* (WIPNET), and consisted of both Christian and Muslim women of Liberia. It is this moment in Liberia's Civil War where the actions of Leymah Gbowee are enormously instrumental in bringing an end to the chaos of the Liberian Civil War (Gbowee, 110).

However history may remember the end of the Liberian Civil War, only an erroneous history will omit the actions of Leymah Gbowee in the years of 2001 to 2002. The daily protests organized by Gbowee are without a doubt some of the more fundamental forces playing a role in the end of Liberia's constant fighting. As a result of the constant protests, Gbowee caught the attention of President Charles Taylor himself and once defiantly declared to him in a hearing, “We are tired of war. We are tired of running. We are tired of begging for bulgur wheat. We are tired of our children being raped. We are now taking this stand, to secure the future of our children. Because we believe, as custodians of society, tomorrow our children will ask us, "Mama, what was your role during the crisis?" Gbowee's leadership did not end after her famous hearing with Charles Taylor. Her leadership continued, the protests grew, and the pressure against Charles Taylor grew to an extent so great that Taylor eventually found himself displaced, out of office and ultimately on trial for war crimes (Gbowee, 178).

Yet, how did Leymah Gbowee manage to contribute to the demise of Charles Taylor and the end of the Civil War by organizing a group of *unarmed* women, when opposition forces, fully equipped with violent military tactics could not? To what extent was Leymah Gbowee truly instrumental in the end of the Liberian Civil War? The question at hand certainly begs one to consider how oppressive regimes such as Taylor's NPFL come to lose power at the hands of unarmed civilians. However brutal the opposition, it appears as if nonviolent movements against oppressive forces *can* play a role. Nevertheless, the question of the extent to which Gbowee was instrumental in the demise of Taylor's forces remains. A closer analysis of Taylor's demise and Gbowee's tactics may reveal a better understanding of Leymah Gbowee's role in ending the Liberian Civil War.