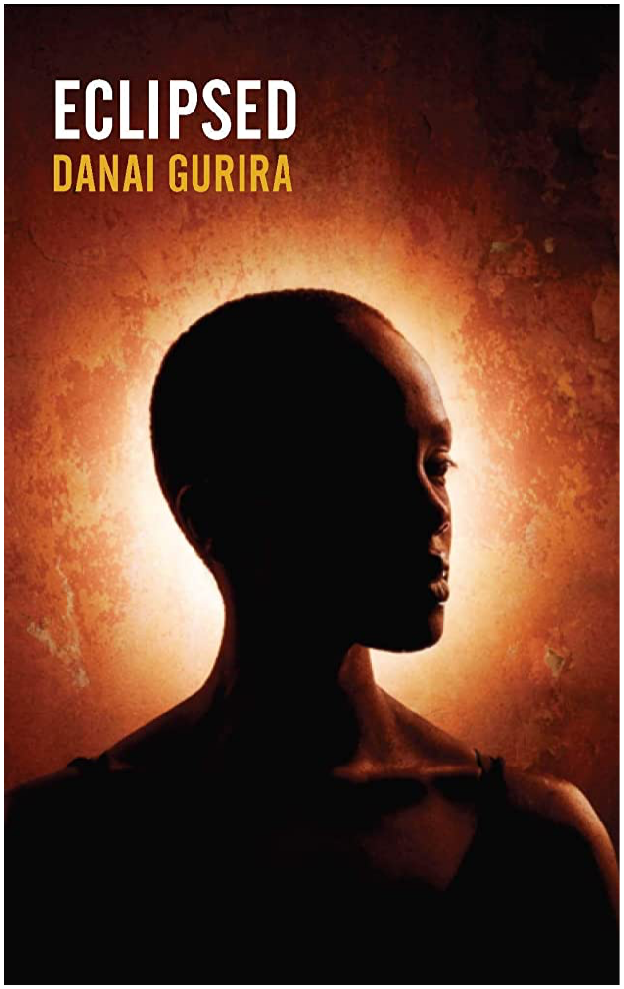
Eclipsed

Dramaturgical Packet



PLAYWRIGHT Danai Gurira / DIRECTOR Liesl Tommy

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Compiled by Caton Berry

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About Danai Gurira

Danai Gurira is a Zimbabwean-American actress and playwright. In 2016, *Eclipsed* held its New York Premiere at the Public Theatre before heading to Broadway, becoming the first play to premiere on Broadway with a completely female and black cast and creative team. That same year, *Eclipsed* received several accolades, including the Drama Desk Award, Outstanding Play at the Lucille Lortel Awards, and was an honoree at the TCG Gala. *Eclipsed* was also nominated in the 2016 Tony Awards for Best Play.

Aside from *Eclipsed*, Gurira has written several other plays that have received accolades. *In the Continuum* received an Obie Award, the Outer Critics Circle Award, and the Helen Hayes Award. *The Convert* was the recipient of six Ovation Awards in addition to the Los Angeles Outer Critics Award). In 2016, *Familiar* also received awards at the Obie Awards and the Drama Desk Awards. All of Gurira's written works are known for highlighting the African voice.

Gurira's notable stage roles include Martha Pentecost in *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* at the Belasco Theatre, Isabella in *Measure for Measure* as part of Shakespeare in the Park at the DelaCorte Theater, and Richard III in the 2022 version of the classic Shakespeare play. On screen, Gurira is best known for her role as Okoye in *Black Panther*, as well as other films set in the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

Gurira is the co-founder of Almasi Arts, an organization focused on improving education of the arts throughout Zimbabwe. On December 2nd, 2018, Gurira became a UN Women Goodwill Ambassador. As an ambassador, Gurira's aim is to fight for gender equality and women's rights.

Black Diamond

Here, Colonel "Black Diamond" is backed by members of the LURD (Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy). This image first appeared in the Wall Street Journal in 2003. A pistol and her cell phone hang from her belt. Her jeans are imprinted with roses. Her followers are wearing similar items of clothing.

It was this image that gave Gurira the inspiration to write *Eclipsed*. The fierce look in their eyes, combined with their guns and stylish gear made Gurira want to learn more about these women. In 2007, Gurira would travel to Liberia. After meeting with several Liberian women, Gurira learned that the intensity depicted in this photo was not a sense of empowerment. Rather, their clothing styles covered the trauma these women had suffered through during civil war. These women had been gang-raped, witnessed family being murdered, had their homes robbed, and their mothers and sisters were raped by soldiers.

While in Liberia, Gurira interviewed thirty women. These included both former soldiers and those involved in the Peace Movement, credited with bringing an end to the civil war. The characters in *Eclipsed* represent these women as well as Gurira's research, which included the documentary "Pray the Devil Back to Hell" and the Human Rights Watch report "Roles and Responsibilities of Child Soldiers."

Roles and Responsibilities of Child Soldiers

The Human Rights Watch Report

The roles and responsibilities of child soldiers within both the opposition and former government ranks were very similar. After completing often arduous training, sometimes for a few days, other times for a month of longer, most children were armed and many served on the front lines. They were often the first to be sent out to fight, occupying dangerous, forward positions. They were also charged with manning road blocks and armed guard duty. Some children interviewed for this report spoke of their fear of death, the killing of other children in fighting, and of those they killed themselves. Others bragged about the killings, proud of their advancement to commander status for their ferocity. Children were also beaten and abused by their superiors and forced to witness abuse and killing.

Robert L. who fought with LURD for one year had two months of training in Bomi County.

"There we learned to fire, to take cover and how to kill. We were made to crawl under barbed wire while they were shooting at us, we were forced to advance towards the gun fire. This was to make us brave… I was assigned around the Iron Gate area. Sometimes we were made to man checkpoints. Other times we would go out on the front. During the fighting, I was very afraid. I killed many people, I saw friends dying all around me. It was terrible."

Seventeen-year-old Joshua P. from Bomi concurred:

"I used to be afraid during the time of the fighting, because of the weapons that they were using to kill people. But on my face, I could never show that I was afraid. There were many people dying, I had to protect myself."

Eric G. from Monrovia describe his training with LURD:

"There were over one hundred of us doing the training. They gave us a gun, we had to learn to fire. We would crawl over and under barbed wire. We were made to lie down and they would see if you were brave by firing near your body. I was afraid during the training, but I didn't show it on my face."

Twelve-year-old Patrick F. spent one and a half years fighting in a government, SBU. Promoted to commander of the SBU for his bravery, he told Human Rights Watch researchers:

"As a commander, I was in charge of nine others, four girls and five boys. We were used mostly for guarding checkpoints but also fighting. I shot my gun many times, I was wounded during World War I, shot in the leg. I was not afraid, when I killed LURD soldiers, I would laugh at them, this is how I got my nickname, 'Laughing and Killing."

Similarly, Samson T. described his feelings about the war:

"I never feared anything. I would laugh at death, even when my friends were killed. Sometimes I would feel bad afterward, about my brothers killed, but by fighting I could bring food to my parents and relatives."

Children described how child soldiers in the SBUs were often the first sent to the front. Charles Q. explained, "There were many boys in the units with government forces, small boys too were fighting with guns. These small ones would be sent to the front first. They were usually around fourteen or fifteen years old but some could be as young as ten." Prince D. also spoke of the widespread use of SBUs. "We were many, plenty small boys, from ten, eleven and twelve. You would be sent to the front first. You go and get killed and then the next one takes your place, it never ended."

Punishment for wrongdoings could mean beatings, torture, and death. The children interviewed from LURD and government forces described the internal rules which prohibited abuses against civilians and the punishments that fighters received for harassment. Nevertheless, they themselves were complicit in stealing, looting and abducting civilians. It was unclear whether some acts would be tolerated by some commanders and not others or whether specific ethnic groups could be targeted with impunity. However, widespread abuse against civilians by all warring parties occurred often with the knowledge and encouragement of commanders.

In explaining the internal rules for LURD fighters, Robert L. stated:

"For punishments, some fighters were killed, some beaten or given other punishment, it depended on what they did wrong and who made the decision. I was caught looting, and had to hold my arms straight (body in upright, push-up position). Whenever I fell from exhaustion, I was beaten and forced to hold my arms straight again. There were strict rules in LURD, for murder or rape, you could be killed, for looting or harassment there were other punishments."

According to one child soldier in the government, who served with both the Jungle Fire and Navy command militias, his commander in Jungle Fire would not tolerate stealing and some of his friends were killed for looting. But in Navy command, looting was permitted. He further explained that one commander would routinely beat people, including his men, for no apparent reason and was abusive to the boys working in his unit.

According to sixteen-year-old Luke F…

"If someone made a mistake they would be beaten, the general would order to have the person tied and they were beaten, sometimes by rope, a stick, a piece of rubber or a belt. They would have their arms first tied behind their back and then beaten. Other times you could be dragged through dirty water or whipped. These punishments were for things like, raping, stealing or killing. But any government soldiers we found, they would be killed immediately."

Capture by enemy combatants usually meant gruesome death. In a few cases, children would be taken as prisoners or forced to fight for the other side. Children described the killings of suspected enemy fighters or collaborators or what happened to themselves when they were caught.

Eric G. explained:

"I saw government soldiers kill three men, right in front of me. They were made to lie on the ground and shot in the head. They were accused of being rebels, because of the markings on their arms. They were shot on July 9 here in town."

Jimmy D., sixteen years old, said:

"We captured this one boy and he fought with us later. He was ambushed in a car together with other government soldiers, near Bopolu. LURD fighters cut the hands and feet off the government fighters and made them get back in the car; the boy was the only one spared. Their car was full of blood. Other boys weren't so lucky. One boy from the government side was caught near the Broadville Bridge; he had been wounded in the leg and unable to retreat. LURD caught him and tied him up attached to a stick. They then cut off his toes, fingers, nose and ears. Then they cut off his private parts and left him to bleed to death. They later threw his body in the river."

Seventeen-year-old Winston W. told us that he was captured by government forces in July together with three other men. He said the three adults were immediately killed; they had their heads cut off with knives, decapitated in front of him. Perhaps because of his younger age, Winston was spared, but "was tied up and severely beaten with rope, with sticks and was punched and kicked. I still have pains from the abuse. I was dragged off and imprisoned and later forced to fight with the government forces."

Prince D. described the killing of enemy combatants: "There is no mercy if the government people catch a LURD person, they cut the head off. The LURD would also kill a government fighter, it was the same on both sides."

ENSLAVEMENT AND FORCED LABOR OF CHILDREN

In addition to their responsibilities as fighters, children were subjected to forced labor which included be used as porters, laborers, cooks, cleaners and as spies to perform reconnaissance and infiltrate enemy lines. Some children were assigned to individual commanders as bodyguards and personal assistants. In general, younger children served as helpers while older ones fought, but there were exceptions—some boys and girls as young as nine and ten years old bore arms. The intensity of combat might also determine what role a child played, carrying goods one day and needed for the fighting the next. Finally, children spent some of their time stealing from civilians in part because they were either never paid or paid infrequently.

One boy who joined the government ATU in June 2003, described his duties. "I was assigned to a commander and provided security for him. I never fought. We would go around to the executive mansion (house of former president Taylor), various police stations, and houses, and collect ammunition to deliver to the troops."

Another who served with MODEL was also assigned to a commander. "I stayed with this general the whole time. I had to wash his clothes, clean his home and cook for him. I was not paid, but

was given food and some clothes. When we advanced, I carried his goods and marched behind the lines."

Mark R. from Bomi County directly served a general as well:

"I never fought, I was a bodyguard for a general. Armed with an AK-47, I protected the general and his house to prevent other soldiers from looting him. I also had to sweep and clean, cut the brush and carry goods. This general had a wife, she was seventeen and also a fighter, she was very strong."

Human Rights Watch researchers collected dozens of testimonies from the internally displaced populations who described the widespread looting of their property by fighters from the LURD, MODEL and government forces. Child soldiers were used to rob civilians who would then be forced to porter their stolen property.

Boys and girls interviewed explained that while some fighters were punished for looting, almost everyone was involved in stealing from civilians. Fighters were generally unpaid or paid irregularly and to survive, lived off the civilian population. Arms became the means to procure goods, food and drugs and child soldiers were complicit in the looting.

Joshua P. who served with the LURD last year said:

"I never directly fought, I would work behind the lines. There were many people killed, so I had to do what I could to survive. I would just move with the forces, helping them carry looted items. As we advanced, civilians would flee their homes. We would go into the houses and steal whatever we could, bikes, money, radios, mattresses, and many other things. I would have to tote the goods after a raid."

Morris C., who was fifteen during the fighting, described looting in the capital:

"They didn't give us money, they didn't give us anything—no food. Sometimes we harassed people for money. We would open stores and take goods. When people came to buy goods, we would take their money then go to buy food in West Point (Monrovia)."

Twelve-year-old Patrick F. complained that sometimes militias would have to buy ammunition from government soldiers in the AFL. To purchase rounds, he would loot houses, sell the goods, and then get the money to buy ammunition to fight.

Luke F., who fought with LURD for three years, stated that trade between fighting groups was not uncommon and that he would take rice they had removed from the port and trade it with government fighters for clothes and beer. According to him, such trade took place throughout July at the new bridge in Monrovia during lulls in the fighting.

Children interviewed for this report reported that child soldiers with LURD and MODEL were never paid and relied solely on stealing to survive. Boys who fought in the government militias told us that they were occasionally paid, albeit sporadically, but that by 2003 pay was no longer

issued. As explained by boys in the government SBUs, salary was linked to active combat, so they would receive money only when they fought. This served as incentive for boys to continue to go back to the front and fight. Children in the SBUs however, complained that the pay was insufficient and was not enough to cover their basic needs.

One boy in the Marine's militia told us he received 300 Liberian dollars (approximately U.S. $7) each time he went to the front. Another who served in Force Fire, a government militia, told us he got 200 Liberian dollars (approximately U.S. $5) for fighting and a bit more when sent on mission. He explained that mission duty was spying on the enemy and was extremely dangerous as you risked being caught and killed. For such duty, he would receive additional pay.

LIFE WITH THE FORCES

Almost every child interviewed for this report had a fighting name, whether or not they were actual combatants. These names often signified particular characteristics of the children and their actions in the fighting. One counselor who works with children in Monrovia suggested that such a practice helped keep children in control as they would forget about their old lives and families. He gave the example of 'Mother's Blessing', a name given by one commander to a boy soldier. The commander had told the child that his mother was killed in the fighting and that she blessed him to go fight against the government troops. Later this same boy found out his mother was still alive.

Other names explained to researchers were: 'Laughing and Killing' because the boy soldier would laugh as he killed enemy fighters; 'Disgruntled' because the child soldier was not satisfied with the fighting; 'Captain No Mercy' because the officer would kill if someone disobeyed orders; and 'Walking Stick' because this child was made to walk directly behind his commander.

Children also were given names describing their acts of brutality towards other children and adults. Some boys and girls had names which indicated what they would do to captured civilians, including names like 'Castrator', 'Ball Crusher', 'Nut Bag Mechanic', and 'Bush Lover'. Some girls also had names such as 'Iron Panty' describing their genitalia either because they refused to have sex or because they were believed to engage in numerous sexual activities. Finally other names might describe punishment—one child was named 'Dirty Water' because he was made to bathe in a hole full of waste for committing an infraction.

Children were rarely given military uniforms to wear, but were issued T-shirts which named their fighting groups and sometimes their fighting slogan. The exception was MODEL who had some uniforms from the former Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) but not all MODEL fighters were issued fatigues and like LURD and government forces, most child soldiers wore T-shirts. In addition, some children were also involved in units like the 'Buck Naked Unit,' where fighters went into combat naked in order to terrorize opponents and civilians. A female commander with LURD also described how her unit would enter combat clad only in undergarments because they believed this appearance would both strengthen their magical protection and intimidate enemies.

Children serving with the government forces were usually issued yellow T-shirts, but other colors used were green, red or black. According to the children, the name of the unit, such as

Jungle Lion or Jungle Fire, would be written on the front, and the division on the back. Arms and weapons were often distributed at the same time as T-shirts. Children fought with RPGs, AK-47s, submachine guns and what they described as '60's, automatic weapons where the ammunition belts would be worn wrapped around the torso.

Boys and girls in LURD described similar weaponry as was used by the government forces but some were also responsible for loading and firing mortars. T-shirts given to children were emblazoned with LURD forces and on the back slogans, such as 'no dog, no rest' or 'no monkey'. According to several of the fighters, these were derogatory statements towards Charles Taylor and his government. Samson T. described the significance:

"'No monkey' this was the name that we gave to the forces of Taylor, we wanted him out and so this was to say 'go away'. For us, the LURD, they called us 'no baboon.' The reason for this is because some of us wear black like baboons. Also, the baboon is a strong animal and can fight well just like LURD."

Hairstyle or lack of hair played a role in unit identification. Some groups had particular hairstyles and would prohibit the cutting of hair. For example, in certain units of Jungle Lion militia, part of the government forces, recruits were not allowed to cut their hair and small braids were fashionable. In some squads of MODEL, hair was colored orange and these children were particularly feared for their atrocities committed against civilians. Some children who served with LURD and government forces told us that when they were taken, their heads were shaved and this formed part of their initiation process.

Children were also initiated into their units through scarification and were given charms and amulets for protection. The practice of initiation is rooted in Liberian culture as in many parts of Liberia, boys and girls become accepted adults in society by undergoing secret initiations. Some analysts have noted that fighting forces in Liberia have co-opted traditional rituals for their fighters for express purposes. Such initiation provides them with a sense of prestige as adults but also enhances a sense of loyalty to their fighting groups instead of to their society and community.

Boys who spoke with Human Rights Watch researchers were reticent to speak of the exact practices that made up initiation, but would display the scars on their bodies and the charms they wore, describing the magic involved. One fighter from LURD explained, "These marks on my chest, they were put there to make me safe from bullets. This way, bullets would bounce off me. Once they were put there, I felt fine." Another fighter from government forces described his scars, "For protection, they would put marks, three or four slashes, on your arms and legs. Then they would rub gun powder into the marks or use a special leaf. This was done so that the bullets wouldn't get you, it really worked."

Some children did not display visible scars, but carried rings and charms. Seventeen-year-old Isaac T. explained: "During the fighting, I was given a charm to wear around my neck, this was from a healer. In my dialect it is called a *bang*, this would protect me from bullets. It really worked, not against the shells but against the bullets." According to the children, charms could

not be worn when having sexual relations or in other situations because then the magic would not work and you risked being killed.

Children were additionally supplied with drugs such as opiates and marijuana, as well as tablets that they were not always able to identify. While many voluntarily smoke and drank and actively sought out liquor, the drugs were often supplied by their commanders.

According to Samson T. from the LURD, "They would give you medicine to eat and drink, the medicine was for protection. If a bullet hit you, it would bounce right off. After I took that medicine, it made me feel bad, it changed my heart. I always took that medicine, every time I went to the front. The commanders would pass it out to us."

David V. explained that within the government forces, "They give you 'ten-ten' in a cap. These are tablets. Once you're on the drugs, even if you are wounded, you don't feel anything."

Twelve-year-old Patrick F. explained how they obtained stimulants:

"For alcohol, we would go to the stores and take whatever we could find. We would smoke a lot of opium or marijuana, some people would sell the drugs to us, other times the commanders would come and hand it out. As a deputy commander, I was doing a lot of drugs, smoking a lot of marijuana, but now that the war has ended, I decided to stop."

Solomon F. told Human Rights Watch:

"We give people protection—*zeke* (the rope). Sometimes the medicine, it is in the food, to make you brave and strong. The *Zo* (senior religious figure) is in charge of protection. Sometimes we cut you with a razor blade and put medicine inside and then nothing can happen to you. We smoke grass, cigarettes, *dugee* (tablets), *cokis* (mashed tablets in a powder). It all makes you brave to go on the front. The commanders give it out. When you take the tablets you can't sleep, it makes you hot in your body. Anytime you go on the frontline, they give it to you. Just got to do something to be strong because you don't want the feeling of killing someone. You need the drugs to give you the strength to kill."

GIRLS IN THE FORCES

Girls served with all three groups in the war as both fighters and helpers although in lesser numbers than boys. Liberian nongovernmental organization employees who work with children believe that more girls were used in the last four years of warfare than in years past but that their exact numbers are unknown. Typically older girls and young women were fighters who served in separate units, while younger girls served as cooks, domestics, porters and cleaners. However, there were cases where young girls fought as well. Some girls were attached to units for short periods and escaped or were released, while others fought for years with the groups.

In addition to the many abuses committed against child soldiers, girls were routinely raped and sexually assaulted. Many were raped at the time of recruitment and continued to be sexually abused during their time with the forces. Collectively known as "wives" whether or not they were attached to a soldier, young girls were often assigned to commanders and provided domestic services to them. Older girls and young women were particularly fierce fighters, commanding respect from their male peers. Some of these women were able to eventually protect themselves from sexual assault but would capture other girls to provide sexual services to boys and men.

Ellen S. a commander of the girls, described her time with LURD:

"When LURD came here, we were caught, lots of girls, and were carried back to Bomi. After training, I became a commander. There were thirty 'wives' in my group; only two died, we were strong fighters. These 'wives' were big girls, the youngest ones perhaps fifteen years old. The young girls, they don't get guns, they were behind us. They tote loads and are security for us.

We would wear t-shirts that were either yellow or brown and said LURD forces. My gun was a '60' that was an automatic weapon and I wore the ammunition around my chest. We would get no payment for fighting, when we attacked somewhere, we busted people's places and would eat. When we captured an enemy, if my heart was there, I would bring them to the base for training. But if my heart was bad lucky, then I would kill them right there."

Dorothy M., who first fought with the government, later became a LURD fighter told us:

"I started fighting with the government troops when I was fifteen. I was a very good fighter. Last year, I was captured by the LURD forces during battle. They asked me to join them so I accepted. I fought in all three world wars in Monrovia and was never wounded."

Boy soldiers who commented on their female colleagues, admired their fighting ability. According to Jimmy D.:

"Plenty girls were trained at the same time, over 200 boys and girls. For the girls, there was the black diamond group, for the boys, it was copper wire. These girls who fight, they are big, sixteen and older, and they fight just like men. They are strong. When the fighting is rough, they move right in because they are juju (magic). They are special. They don't move in on the frontline, but they go ahead when there's a problem, we would retreat and the 'wives' would go forward."

Sexual relations between girl and boy soldiers were permissible, but according to some girls, specific rules dictated these relations. Ellen S. explained that, "No woman can love two soldier men and a woman can't love to your friends' boyfriend. If you break these rules, we beat you and discipline you." She further told us that some older girl fighters could not be forced to have sex but that, "if you want some love, you can get it, but me, I was a strong fighter and stayed alone. The fighters couldn't force us. When we attack, we usually captured girls for them. We would get plenty children for them. I captured two girls who are now in Bomi hills."

While some older girls were able to protect themselves, many more were victims of rape and sexual assault. Forced to join the fighting groups and subjected to forced labor, they were sexually enslaved and some are survivors of multiple gang rapes.

Sixteen-year-old Evelyn N. told her story:

"In 2001, I was captured in Lofa County by government forces. The forces beat me, they held me and kept me in the bush. I was tied with my arms kept still and was raped there. I was fourteen years old.

I was taken from home, it was during the day. Plenty of armed men came into the house, government forces, and dragged me out in the bushes. After the rape, I was taken to a military base not far from Voinjama in Lofa County. I was used in the fighting to carry medicine. During the fighting, I would carry medicine on my head and was not allowed to talk. I had to stand very still.

I had to do a lot of work for the soldiers, sweeping, washing, cleaning. During this time, I felt really bad. I was afraid. I wanted to go home, but was made to stay with the soldiers. I spent one year and two months with them before I got sick and was sent away.

The soldiers were terrible, they would kill civilians plenty. They accused them of not supporting them and helping the enemy. We would steal clothes, food, money whatever we could find from civilians. Treatment for women was worse than for men. They would tie up women, beat them and rape them. My auntie, nine soldiers raped her right in front of me, she is very sick now.

For girls in our unit, there were many. Only ten of us would go to the front, the others stayed behind and did chores, collected food and fetched water. These nine others were strong fighters and all had 'husbands' among the male fighters, other fighters would take the girls at the base for loving."

Clementine P. was fifteen when abducted by LURD fighters. A survivor of multiple rapes, she was severely injured when forced to abort her unborn child. Emaciated and sick, a portion of her intestine is protruding through her abdomen wall although she has received some medical treatment.

"My Ma and Pa are dead, I have no one to help. When the rebels came, I was small, they forced me to go with them. I got pregnant from the fighters. When the time came for birth, the baby died. Four or five of the boys pushed on my stomach to force me to get rid of the baby, my stomach now is broken."

One of the more severe cases, the plight of Clementine is nevertheless shared by the thousands of girls and women who are survivors of brutal rape and sexual assault by the fighting forces. For girls who served with the fighters, medical treatment with screening for sexually transmitted infections and diseases including HIV needs to be included as part of the demobilization process. The programs should also emphasize psychological counseling or other appropriate psychological support for all girls. Continued medical services in their communities will be

needed both for themselves, their children where applicable, and for other girls who may not wish to be identified as fighters in the formal demobilization programs.

In 'Eclipsed,' Female Captives in Liberia's Civil War Seek Sustenance

14 OCTOBER 2015/CHARLES ISHERWOOD/THE NEW YORK TIMES
(Excerpted)

Lupita Nyong'o, the Oscar winner and radiant darling of red-carpet-watchers, is not really the star of "Eclipsed," Danai Gurira's shattering drama about women's suffering during the Liberian civil wars. Although the character played by Ms. Nyong'o, called only "the Girl" in the program, occupies its dramatic center, Ms. Gurira's play is not a star vehicle but an ensemble piece, with terrific roles for five women.

Nevertheless, it was Ms. Nyong'o's decision to appear in the play that helped usher it onto the stage of the Public Theater, where it opened on Wednesday night in a riveting, superbly acted production directed by Liesl Tommy.

I hope Ms. Nyong'o's starlight draws audiences to this detailed and painfully moving exploration of the brutality and dehumanization that seem to be endemic to African conflicts. The play illustrates how women and girls are usually the first and most horrifically abused victims of such warfare. Although the events that inspired it took place more than a decade ago, "Eclipsed" remains dispiritingly topical.

Set during the waning days of the rebellions that ultimately ousted Charles Taylor, Liberia's longtime strongman dictator, in 2003, the play takes place in and around the bullet-riddles, barely furnished single room where the "wives" of the commanding officer of a rebel faction are forced to live.

They sleep on thin blankets, subsist on erratic arrivals of food and are regularly called to bed by the "C.O.," as they refer to the rebel leader, who remains unseen. When he approaches the door of their dwelling, fear and anxiety leap into their eyes as they jump to attention, lined up like soldiers, awaiting his choice for sexual service.

Helena (Saycon Sengbloh) is the oldest at 25, and has been held in sexual slavery for at least a decade. She's denoted as "Wife No. 1," or just "No. 1." Throughout the play the four central characters refer to one another, and themselves, only by their captor's designation, a powerful symbol of their dehumanization, and an indication of how deeply a sense of self-alienation has set in.

When Rita (Akosua Busia), a member of the respected women's council working to end the bloodletting, visits their compound, she asks them pointedly what their names are; they are hesitant to answer, perhaps unable to face the recollection of their former lives, now so impossibly distant.

As the play begins, Helena and Bessie (Pascale Armand), the pregnant third "wife," are attempting to keep secret the presence of a young girl, played by Ms. Nyong'o, who has wandered into the camp after fleeing violence in her village. She sleeps under a rubber tub, but when she steps outside she is discovered by the C.O. and immediately raped, becoming another piece of human chattel.

Dark though its subject matter is, "Eclipsed" has moments of warmth and even humor, as the women try to buoy one another's spirits and maintain some modicum of civilization. A running gag – though the term seems frivolous in this context, finds the new arrival reading from a biography of Bill Clinton. The women become engrossed in the scandal surrounding Monica Lewinsky, and naturally refer to her as "Wife No. 2."

The pragmatic Helena, played with graceful warmth and subversive strength by Ms. Sengbloh, is the den mother, who does much of the cooking and helps Bessie, whom Ms. Armand infuses with a frisky rebelliousness, with both her pregnancy and her recalcitrant hair.

Helena watches in wary distrust when Maima (a fiercely good Zainab Jah), the second "wife," arrives bearing a gift of rice. Maima has freed herself from the grasp of the C.O. through the only means possible, by joining the soldiers in battle. She bears herself with a menacing swagger, a machine gun perpetually slung over one shoulder.

"Eclipsed" gains dramatic intensity as a moral tug of war takes place between Helena and Maima over Ms. N'Yong'o's character. Maima encourages the impressionable young woman to follow the path she herself has chosen, thus escaping an endless future of sexual abuse; Helena implores her to resist, fearing both for her life and her conscience. But ultimately promises of escape from repeated rape force her to make a choice whose consequences for the psyche are made achingly clear in Ms. Nyong'o's tremendously accomplished performance.

In the early scenes she's very much a girl, who speaks with bright eyes and the innocence of youth of someday achieving a career. But gradually she is transformed by her experience out in the field, fighting alongside Maima.

In the play's most searing scene, she admits to Maima with confusion and horror the role she played in the violent serial rape of a young woman after a battle. Ms. Nyong'o delivers this harrowing monologue with a disoriented sense of helplessness and shame that cuts to the bone. And with Maima's violent, contemptuous reaction to her confession, "Eclipsed" reaches even deeper into the unrelenting darkness in which the women are forced to exist.

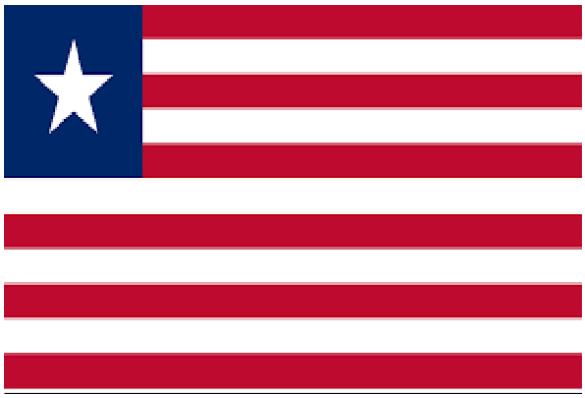
The superlative performances from all five actors, under Ms. Tommy's sensitive direction, draw us so deeply into the lives of the women that this darkness nevertheless flickers with glimmers of light, humanity and even hope. At its conclusion, that last emotion finally breaks through forcefully, like a piercing shaft of sunlight breaking through a cloudburst.

But Ms. Gurira, who is also an accomplished actress (some may know her from "The Walking Dead") and who has clearly studied the experience of women like these characters thoroughly, knows better than to suggest that the path ahead will be easy. Immediate relief may

be near, but the final image, which finds the Girl onstage alone, immobilized by the possibility of another life unfolding, leaves us with the unsettling sense that she cannot even envision a future that could erase the deep scars of the past.

Liberia:
An Overview

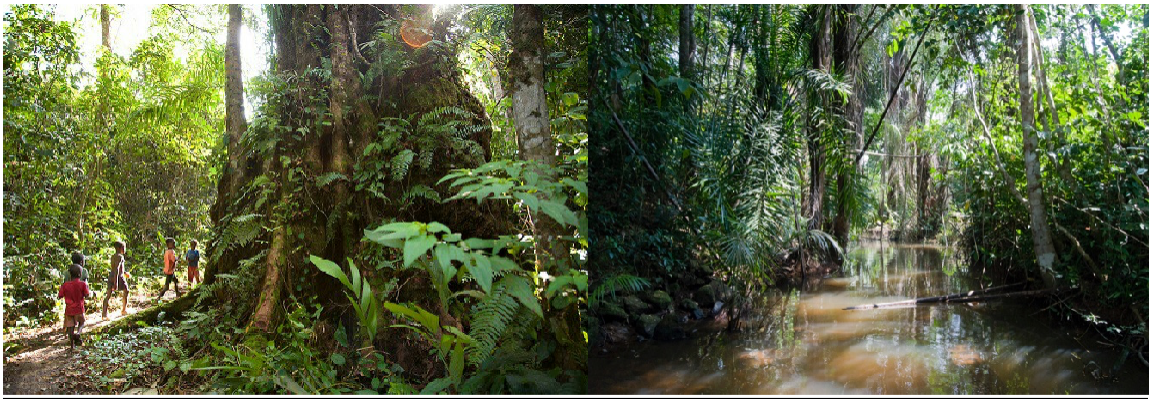
An Introduction to the Main Setting of *Eclipsed*



As Africa's oldest Republic, the name Liberia means "land of the free." In the 1820s, freed slaves from the U.S. established their settlement here. In the years that followed, their descendants had a heavy influence on Liberian politics, modeling their society off of the United States. Monrovia is both the capital and Liberia's largest city.

The Sierra Leone, Cote dIvoire, and Guinea border Liberia, which connects to the Atlantic Ocean in the southwest. While Liberia's coast consists of various sandy plains, hills and small mountains can be found inland. The Mano, Morro, and Cavalla are the country's main rivers. The heat is intense all throughout the year, with heavy rainfall typically occurring in the summer.

NATURE



The Sapo National Park and the Gola Forest National Park can both be found in Liberia. The Sapo National Park is known for housing several rare pygmy hippos. The Gola Forest National Park resides along the border with the Sierra Leone. The Gola Rainforest National Park lies on the other side of the border. These parks all protect one of Earth's biodiversity hot spots. These areas contain large amounts of plant and animal species.

In total, roughly 68% of the country's land is covered in forest. Types of trees that can be found include teak, mahogany, cacao, coffee, rubber, and raffia palm. Monkeys, chimpanzees, elephants, snakes, and antelope all reside in Liberia, along with the previously mentioned pygmy hippopotamus. When Liberia's civil war began in 1989, several of these animals were targeted, causing their population to decrease. After the war ended in 2003, their populations began to recover.

MUSIC

Highlife is one of Liberia's most popular genres, that started in Ghana. It is a style of music that combines different local fusions of African metre and western jazz music. While highlife borrows structure from Akan and Kpanlogo music, it is typically played with western instruments, including horns and guitars. Highlife saw a resurgence in popularity after World War II when Nigeria's Igbo people began creating their own guitar riffs. The genre has maintained popularity due to its integration with religious establishments. It has also had a positive effect on immigrant Ghanaians that have left their homeland. Pictured above is musician Amakye Dede, known for songs such as "Jealousy go shame" and "Iron Boy."

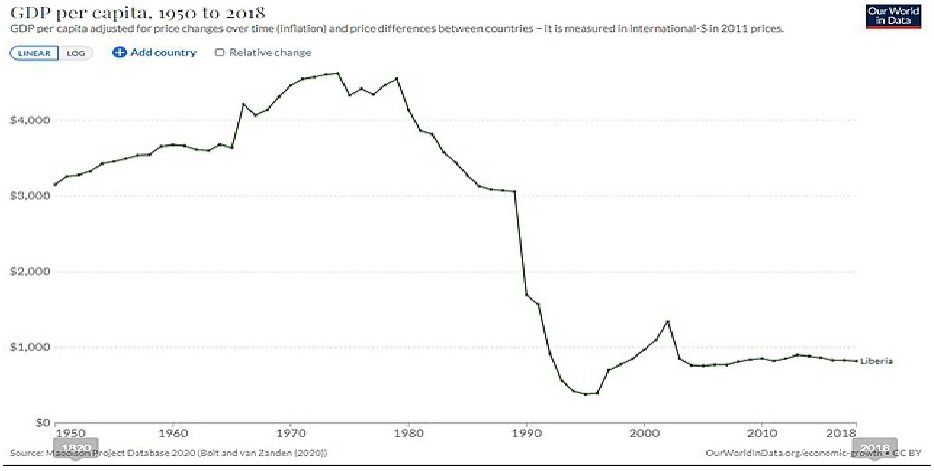
Hipco is a form of Liberian hip hop. It is typically performed in Liberian English and is known for having lyrics with social messages. According to Robin Dopoe Jr., hipco serves as "the medium through which rappers speak against societal ills, including injustice and corruption." The "co" is short for Kolokwa, a Liberian dialect. This dialect is a blend of English and 15 native tongues, and improvisations to it are always being made. This makes hipco's lyrics nearly incomprehensible to an American audience. Even in Liberia, the cultural elite consider it to be lowbrow. Takun J is one of the most prolific hipco artists, and some of his most famous songs include "Who Make You Cry" and "A Song for Hawa."

PEOPLE

Liberia consists of many different ethnic groups. These include the Kpelle, the Bassa, the Gio, the Kru, the Grebo, and the Mano people. Those descended from U.S. slaves are known as Americo-Liberians. While English is the primary language spoken in Liberia, other groups have their own languages. 85% of Liberians identify as Christians, 12% are Islam, and a small number practice other beliefs or simply are not religious at all.

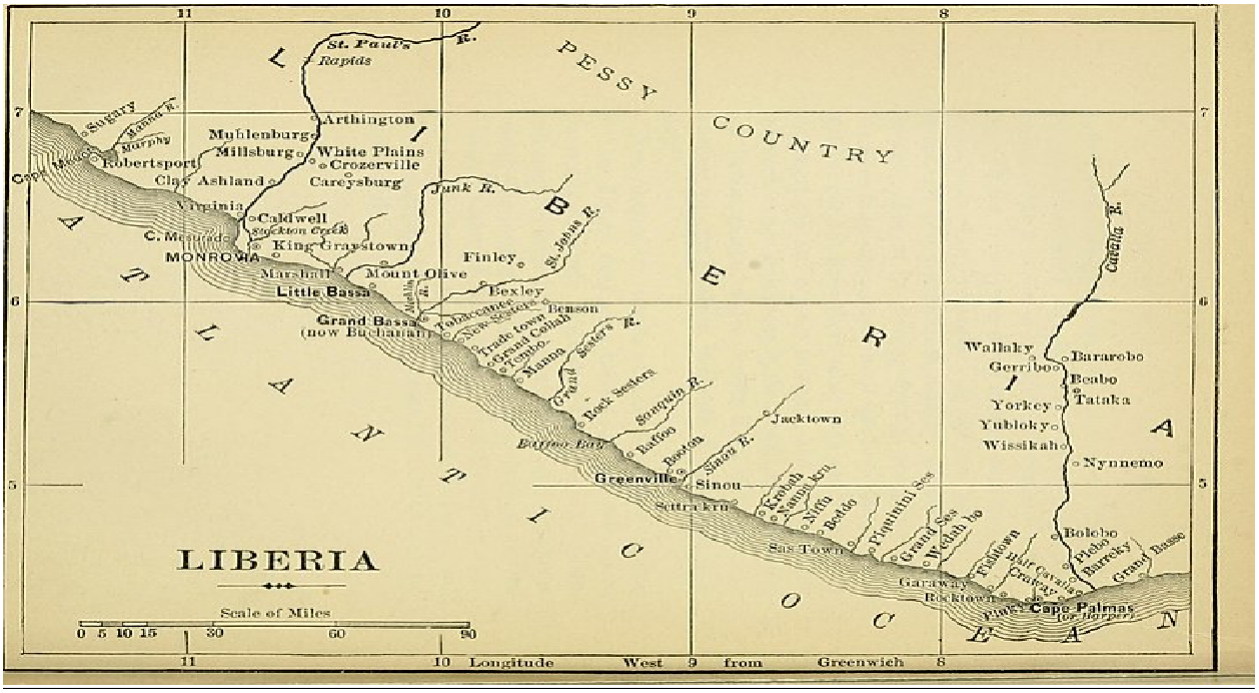
ECONOMY

Liberia is economically disadvantaged. Many Liberians grow crops such as rice, cassava, and vegetables while also raising livestock. Roughly 40% of workers in Liberia serve in the service sector, which is dominated by the government and tourist industry. Liberia's natural resources, such as diamonds, iron ore, and gold, are sold to other countries.



LIBERIAN HISTORY

In the 1400s, African people were discovered as Liberia's inhabitants when European explorers arrived at the coast. The variety of spices found in Liberia made the area popular amongst Portugese traders. During the early 1800s, the American Colonization Society purchased land from the locals and founded a colony at Cape Mesurado in 1821. The first group of freed U.S. slaves arrived in 1822. A white American named Jehudi Ashmun arrived soon after, and became the settlement's director. Monrovia, the main settlement, was named after U.S. President James Monroe. In 1847, Liberia became an independent republic.



Until 1980, Liberia had been under the control of the Americo-Liberians. The government was overthrown by the military, and civil war began in 1989. Liberia's president was killed in 1990. A piece agreement was reached in 1996, and rebel leader Charles Taylor became president the year after. After fighting started once again, Taylor was forced out of the country in 2003. Several children fought in this war, which ended that year.

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf became president in 2005, the first elected woman to lead a country in Africa. She was re-elected in 2011, receiving the Nobel Peace Prize shortly after. She left office in 2018, and George Weah became president. For Liberia, it was the first time since 1944 that a power transfer occurred between two democratic leaders.

In 2014, Ebola spread from Guniea into Liberia. The outbreak ended in 2016, and by that point 4,8000 Liberians lost their lives to the virus. In spite of Liberia's obstacles, the country still was on the path to recovery from war. In 2016, the United Nations made the decision to hand responsibility for security back to Liberia's army and police.

The First Liberian Civil War (1989-1996)

On December 24th, 1989, Charles Taylor lead a group of Libyan rebels invading Liberia from the Ivory Coast. The National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) was mainly a group of Gio and Mano peoples from Nimba County, two groups that were victims of persecution from Samuel Doe, Liberia's President.

While the NPFL included former members of the Liberian military and civilians, children were also made to be soldiers. From December 1989 to 1993, the group challenged Liberia's government and other militias in support of Doe. During this time, the NFPL killed thousands of Liberians who opposed Taylor's movement. In 1990, the NFPL moved towards Monrovia, Liberia's capital. There, members of the Krahn and Mandingo groups were targeted due to their loyalty to President Doe.

Due to the increasing number of civilian casualties, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) sent Ghanaian and Nigerian troops into Monrovia. While these troops were initially meant to serve as peacekeepers, their presence caused the war to continue. On September 9, 1990, Doe was killed by Prince Johnson and the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL), who also stood in opposition to the government.

ECOWAS troops spearheaded the creation of the Interim Government of National Unity (IGNU) led by Dr. Amos C. Sawyer. While Sawyer would go on to become the nation's first president, Taylor continued fighting. Seven factions would eventually take part in the war, including the United Liberian Movement of Liberia for Democracy (ULIMO), the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), the Lofa Defense Force, as well as several members of Liberia's armed forces who remained loyal to Doe.

In 1992, Taylor and the NFPL took part in a massive attack on Monrovia, known as Operation Octopus. The attack went on for two months. In August 1996, the warring sides were forced by Nigerian officials to sign the Abuja Accord. As part of this agreement, all groups were to disarm and demobilize by 1997, while also abiding by elections monitored by the United Nations. As a result, Charles Taylor was able to defeat Ellen John Sirleaf, establishing his rule over Liberia.

The Second Liberian Civil War (1999-2003)

Following Charles Taylor's triumph in the 1996 election, Liberia only remained peaceful for two years. The LURD was a group of Mandingo and Krahn fighters led by Sekou Conneh. Several had been members of the United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy (ULIMO), which fought in the first Liberian civil war against Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL).

In September 2000, Taylor convinced anti-government dissidents to form the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). His goal was to decrease rebel support from the governments of Sierra Leone and Guinea. The RUF, along with other Taylor supporters, expanded the conflict into three nations. The United Nations condemned Taylor for his actions. Meanwhile, the United States and Great Britain showed support for Guinea and Sierra Leone.

By 2002, the LURD troops were roughly 27 miles out from Monrovia. Leaders Sekou Conneh and Thomas Nimely led the troops to victory in several attacks bypassing government strongholds. In May of that year, the LURD conducted an attack on Arthington, 12 miles from Monrovia.

In early 2003, the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL), a second rebel group, began challenging Taylor's government. By May, Taylor only had control of roughly a third of Liberia. With an attack on Monrovia imminent, Ghana President John Kufuor held a peace conference in Accra. The aim was to come to an agreement that would prevent any more violence in this four-year long conflict. Initially, Taylor was reluctant. As a result, Leymah Gbowee founded the "Women of Liberia Mass Action in Peace." Following a silent protest outside the presidential palace, Taylor agreed to attend the peace conference.

In July, LURDS forces closed in on Monrovia despite the peace conferences taking place in Accra. Over a thousand civilians were killed in the violence. LURD declared a ceasefire on July 29th. This allowed the ECOWAS to send Nigerian troops to Monrovia as peacekeepers. Knowing his government was destined to fail, Taylor fled into exile in Nigeria. On August 18th, the Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) announced the formation of the National Transition

Government of Liberia. Gyude Bryant would serve as president. This allowed Liberia's first post-civil war election to occur in 2005. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf became the 24th president of Liberia. More importantly, she was the first women to lead an African nation.

How *Eclipsed* and its Themes Are Relevant Today

Eclipsed tells the story of a 15-year-old African girl, and how she escapes an encampment to become a child soldier amongst rebel forces. Through her writing, Danai Gurira aims to raise awareness about the injustices women and young girls face around the world. “Narrative is in my toolbox, and what I find powerful about narrative is that it actually allows people to be connected, to be disarmed, to see other people across the world that they might perceive of as statistics, rather than as actual fellow people that they care about and that they want to see freed to live self-determined lives,” Gurira said in an interview with Fast Company.

In September 2020, President George Weah declared rape to be a national emergency in Liberia. This was after a three-day protest in Monrovia, which resulted in violent clashes with authorities against 5,000 anti-rape protestors. According to the World Health Organization, 75% of Liberian women had experience rape by the end of the civil war. Covid-19 restrictions have caused the amount of sex and gender-influenced attacks to rise by 50%, a level which had not been seen during the Liberian civil war, where *Eclipsed* takes place.

Throughout *Eclipsed*, Gurira crafts a story that allows the audience to connect with the female characters by showing familiar connections. The women argue over things like their hair, their clothes, and what will be made for dinner. Even as the Girl hides from the Commanding Officer, these normal types of conversations are still being had.

When the Girl first arrives at the camp, she has a bright and ambitious personality, with dreams of going to school to become a doctor or a lawyer. She embodies the central theme of the play. Each of these women has a light inside of them, however this light has been blocked out due to the rape and captivity they face in their oppressive society.

By the end of *Eclipsed*, the audience is left with one question. What will happen to these women once the war is over? How can the normality of women and children being raped be abolished? Who will take a political stance and hold those who have done these horrendous acts accountable?

It is important to note that, in spite of their circumstances, Gurira does not want the women in *Eclipsed* to only be seen as victims. “These are dynamic women and girls, in the most treacherous of circumstances,” she says. “I want the audience to feel at home with them.”

Glossary of Terms and Noteworthy People

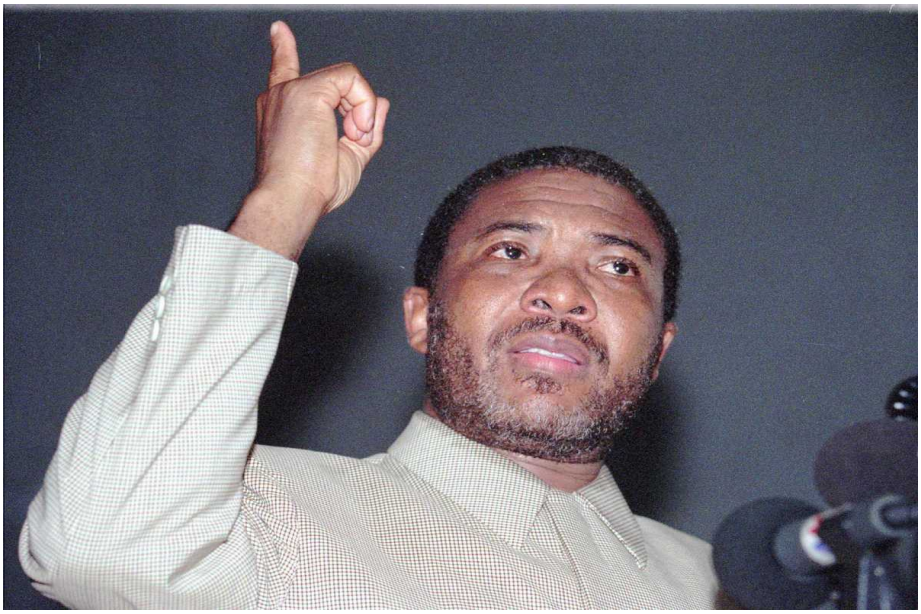
The following terms and people play a prominent role, or are at least referenced, throughout Danai Gurira's *Eclipsed*.

ACCRA is both the capital and largest city in Ghana, and can be found on the southern coast at the Gulf of Guinea.

BILL CLINTON is the 42nd President of the United States, from 1993 to 2001. On December 19th, 1998, Clinton was impeached due to his sexual relationship with White House intern Monica Lewinsky.

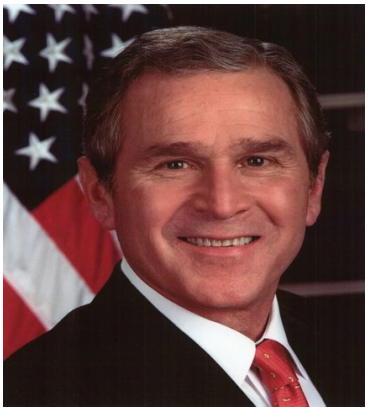
CASSAVA, despite being a plant, is grown as a crop in various tropical and sub-tropical regions. The roots are edible, and a good source of carbohydrates. Behind rice and maize, Cassava is the third largest source of food-based carbohydrates in the tropics.

CHARLES MCARTHUR GHANKAY TAYLOR was both a convicted war-lord and the 22nd President of Liberia from 1997 until 2003, when he resigned due to the Second Liberian War. As the leader of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia, and after Doe's execution, a larger portion of Africa was put under his control.



FUFU is a word from the Twi language (spoken in Ghana and the Ivory Coast). It means "mash" or "mix" and is a popular dish in Central Africa. "Fufu" refers to the sour dough made from starchy food crops including yams, plantains, and cassava.

GEORGE W. BUSH is the 43rd President of the United States, having served from 2001 to 2009 as a member of the Republican party.



The **IVORY COAST** (also known as the Republic of Cote dIvoire) is a West African country located on the southern coast. It was formerly a part of French West Africa, and gained independence in 1960.

JANET JACKSON is an American singer and the youngest child of the famous Jackson family. She is known for expressing innovation, socially conscious messages, and sexually explicit images through several of her songs, including “Nasty,” “Rhythm Nation,” and “Together Again.”

KAKATA is the capital city of Liberia’s Margibi County. It is a transit town located in Liberia.

LURD is an acronym for the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy. As part of the Republic of Liberia, the group aims to build a democracy via the removal of the Taylor government. It’s structure is divided into two sections. The military campaign was designed to get Liberian President Charles Taylor out of office, while the political campaign sought to restore law and order. The LURD dictates that no former warlords will be involved with the group. Many of its commanders were Taylor’s associates in the 1990s.

MISS ECOWAS is an international beauty pageant designed in order to promote both peace as well as the youth agenda of the Economic Community of West African States.

MONROVIA is the capital city of Liberia. As the nation’s primate city, Monrovia is the economic and cultural center of the country. Serving as the seat of Liberian government, Monrovia’s economy is also centered around its harbor

NIMBA COUNTY is a northeastern Liberian county. It shares a border with the Eastern Republic of Cote dIvoire and the Northwestern Republic of Guinea. In regards to population, Nimba is the second largest county in Liberia. The name "Nimba" originates from "Nenbaa ton," alluding to a slippery mountain where young girls slip and fall. It's natural resources include gold, diamonds, iron ore, and timber.

A **PIT LATRINE** is a toilet that gathers feces in a hole in the ground. Human waste enters through a drop hole. This hole will sometimes be connected either to a squatting pan or toilet seat.

SAMUEL KANYON DOE was the 21st President of Liberia, from 1980 to 1990. Throughout his rule, Doe was known for totalitarianism, corruption, and showing a preference for ethnic Krahns. Because of this, opposition towards his regime arose from both the Liberians and the United States. He was eventually captured and executed by the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia.

SEUN KUTI is a Nigerian musician, and the youngest son of Afrobeat artist Fela Kuti. As of 2023, Kuti is now the leader of Egypt 80, Fela Kuti's former band.

SPECIAL JUJU is a term used by characters throughout the play, such as Bessie, which refers to medicine. When referring to the rebels, Bessie says "Dat whot hep dem not get killed when dey fight."

TIMBERLAND refers to a piece of forest land that is suitable for timber.

TUPAC SHAKUR is one of the most influential rappers of all time. He has sold more than 75 million records. Through songs such as “2 of Amerikaz Most Wanted,” “Changes”, and “California Love”, Shakur was prolific for addressing the social issues he witnessed in America’s inner cities and became a symbol for the fight against racial inequality in America.

VEXXED is a word used to describe how someone feels when they are annoyed or bothered over meaningless and trivial things.

WORLD WAR I was one of history’s deadliest global conflicts. Fighting between the Allies (France, Russia, Japan, Italy, The United Kingdom, and the United States) and the Central Powers (The Ottoman Empire, Germany, and Austria Hungary) took place in Europe, the Middle East, the Pacific, Africa, and Asia. 9 million soldiers were killed in combat, and 5 million civilians died due to hunger, disease, and military action. During the first years of the war, Liberia was neutral. On August 4, 1917, the United States declared war on the German Imperial Government, so Liberia joined the Allies.

YOUSSOU N'DOUR is a Senegalese singer, described by Rolling Stone Magazine in 2004 as "perhaps the most famous singer alive" throughout Senegal and Africa. He is known for inventing a style of music known as *mbalax*, a genre with origins in the Serer music njuup tradition.

ZAMUNDA is the fictional land in Africa depicted in the 1988 Eddie Murphy comedy film Coming to America.