IU Strengthens Connections to Liberia

Among the nations of Africa especially well represented at Indiana University is Liberia, a country founded in 1847 by repatriated freed slaves and freeborn blacks from the United States. Earliest links to and research on Liberia at IU go back to the 1930s. Currently, Ruth Stone, a long-time faculty member of IU’s Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology, has researched extensively on the music and cultures of Liberia. Amos Sawyer, co-director of IUB’s Workshop in Political Theory and Policy Analysis, former interim president of Liberia from 1990–1994, and former dean of the College of Social Sciences and Humanities of the University of Liberia, has been on the Bloomington campus since 2001. At IU, he is finishing a book, Beyond Plunder: Toward Democratic Governance in Liberia, to be published in fall by Lynn Rienner Publishers.

IU Bloomington is also home to one of the largest repositories of Liberian research materials among U.S. universities. In the late 1980s, while she was the director of the Archives of Traditional Music (ATM), Stone’s colleagues began sending their audio and videotapes of Liberian music performances and interviews to her as well as other research materials. In 1997, anthropologist Svend Holsoe of the University of Delaware donated his vast private collection of materials on Liberia to IUB. Together with another large collection of field notes, research materials, and art and artifacts donated later by anthropologist Warren d’Azevedo of the University of Nevada–Reno, these form the core of a unique repository now known as the Liberian Collections Project (LCP), housed at the Archives. Among the materials in the collection, besides musical and film recordings, are government documents, newspapers, ethnographic materials, missionary archives, photographs, and cultural artifacts. In addition, IUB’s Mathers Museum of World Cultures has an on-going exhibit, Preserving Liberia: The IU Connection, that can be seen until the end of December 2005. This exhibit was drawn from more than 1,000 pieces of Liberian art and artifacts, including the d’Azevedo and Holsoe collections, held by the Mathers Museum and IU Art Museum.

This spring, LCP Coordinator Verlon Stone announced the awarding of two projects to be funded by the British Museum’s Endangered Archives Programme: a pilot study to preserve and provide access to Liberia’s Presidential Archives and National Archives and a project to preserve the personal papers of William V. S. Tubman, Liberia’s longest serving president (1944–1971). The Tubman Papers Project received a supplementary grant from the Title VI Cooperative Archives Project and the Cooperative Africana Microform Project. Stone says that these projects grew out of an assessment trip that he and LCP advisory board member, Elwood Dunn of Sewanee–The University of the South, took to Liberia in August 2004 to assess the country’s document repositories after so many years of civil strife. In addition to the archives, IUB’s partners on these projects are Indiana University Libraries’ IU Archives and

Printed cloth from Liberia depicts various presidents of states belonging to the Organization of African Unity (now named the African Union), on the occasion of the OAU meeting in Liberia of 1979.

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E. Lingle Craig Preservation Laboratory, as well as the Liberian Presidential Archives, Center for National Documents and Records/National Archives—Liberia, and the University of Liberia.

In late April, IU's links to Liberia were further strengthened by the signing of an agreement of friendship and cooperation with the University of Liberia. The signatories were Patrick O'Meara, dean for international programs signing on behalf of IU President Adam W. Herbert, and University of Liberia President Al-Hassan Conteh. Accompanying the president was Sedia Massaquoi-Bangoura, senior program coordinator of the University of Liberia.

The linkage represents a new phase for the Liberian university, which underwent extensive damage, looting, and faculty brain drain due to the long-lasting civil war. With the advent of a negotiated peace for Liberia in 2003, Conteh and his administration have been working to resume the kind of academic programming and professional training essential for the reconstruction of the country. O'Meara says that the agreement will facilitate the exchange of teaching, research, personnel, and students, as well as books, and he looks forward to very productive relationship with the Liberian university.

—RMN

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assured by the U.S. Embassy that, contrary to perception, 80 percent of applicants do indeed get their visas, even though the process might now take six weeks. Of course, there must be recruitment efforts by departments, schools, and the university as a whole. At the same time, we must also allocate resources to nurturing our international alums. Most recently, IU alumni clubs in 19 countries in Asia, Canada, Europe, the Middle East, India, and Latin America eagerly agreed to host events for prospective students and their parents.

International students have contributed enormously to the diversity and quality of our university and to the economic well-being of our state. I hope that their special presence will grow rather than decline. Herman Wells, in being at the founding of important Thai institutions such as NIDA, profoundly understood the essence of the contribution of international students and international knowledge to the intellectual stature of Indiana University. We need to ensure that his great legacy continues to flourish.

—IU Home Pages
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