



African Immigrants Project

Massa Washington Timeline

Massa Washington is a Liberian journalist who came to the United States as a political asylee. Like many Liberians, Massa fled her country more than once, returning each time the political situation stabilized. She applied for asylum in the U.S. only as a last resort, and still hopes to return home one day. This timeline juxtaposes events in Massa's life with ongoing political developments in her country*. Her life illustrates how an individual's life can be shaped by larger events.

**Events in Liberia are indicated in italics.*

1980

A military coup d'état occurs. President W. R. Tolbert is assassinated.

Massa's father's business in Monrovia is confiscated due to the change in government.

1985

Civil unrest grows.

Massa begins work as a professional journalist.

December 1989

Civil war breaks out among various factions of rebel soldiers.

July 1990

Rebel soldiers led by Charles Taylor capture parts of Monrovia.

Massa is forced to work at a rebel-held radio station.

December 1990

Civil war escalates.

After a prominent journalist is assassinated, she decides to flee to Cote d'Ivoire.

1991

An interim government, supported by the U.S. and the U.N., is established.

February 1992

The situation in Liberia seems stabilized.

Massa returns home and gets a job at an independent newspaper.

1992-1996

Fighting is ongoing between West African peacekeeping forces, Charles Taylor's rebel soldiers, and other rebel factions.

Massa is targeted by rebels. Her home is looted and her family threatened.

April 1996

Monrovia is taken by the rebels.

As the city burns, Massa flees by ship to Ghana.

February 1997

Massa flies back to Liberia for one week to get a U.S. visa. Fearing for her life and her future, her father makes her promise not to return to Liberia.

March 1997

Massa arrives in Atlanta, where she stays with a family friend.

July 1997

Against the wishes of her friends and family, Massa returns to Liberia to vote in the upcoming elections.

Charles Taylor is elected president.

1997-1999

Former fighters, particularly those of President Charles Taylor, terrorize the public.

Massa is continually threatened and harassed.

January 1999

After criticizing the government on national radio, Massa is picked up by security agents and interrogated. Upon her release, she fears further persecution and flees to the U.S.

May 1999

Massa moves to Philadelphia and applies for political asylum.

March 2000

She is granted asylum.

Massa works with a human services agency as a Job Development Coordinator. She also works with the Liberian community assisting with resettlement and protection issues for refugees.

The situation in Liberia is still volatile and Liberians continue to flee their country. According to the U.S. Committee for Refugees, well over 200,000 Liberians were refugees by the end of 2000. An estimated 150,000 people were killed between 1989 and 1996.