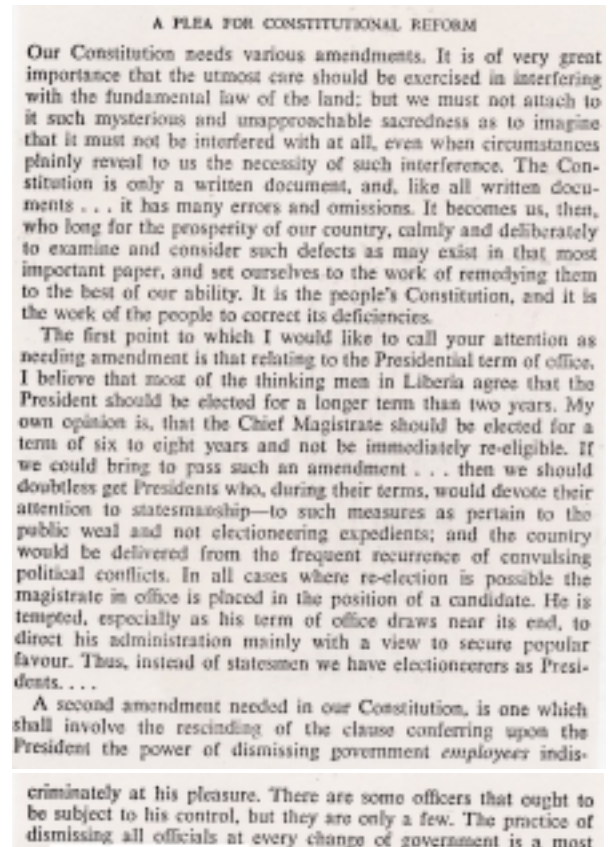


## A PLEA FOR CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM

Our Constitution needs various amendments. It is of very great importance that the utmost care should be exercised in interfering with the fundamental law of the land; but we must not attach to it such mysterious and unapproachable sacredness as to imagine that it must not be interfered with at all, even when circumstances plainly reveal to us the necessity of such interference. The Constitution is only a written document, and, like all written documents . . . it has many errors and omissions. It becomes us, then, who long for the prosperity of our country, calmly and deliberately to examine and consider such defects as may exist in that most important paper, and set ourselves to the work of remedying them to the best of our ability. It is the people's Constitution, and it is the work of the people to correct its deficiencies.

The first point to which I would like to call your attention as needing amendment is that relating to the Presidential term of office. I believe that most of the thinking men in Liberia agree that the President should be elected for a longer term than two years. My own opinion is, that the Chief Magistrate should be elected for a term of six to eight years and not be immediately re-eligible. If we could bring to pass such an amendment . . . then we should doubtless get Presidents who, during their terms, would devote their attention to statesmanship—to such measures as pertain to the public weal and not electioneering expedients; and the country would be delivered from the frequent recurrence of convulsing political conflicts. In all case where re-election is possible the magistrate in office is placed in the position of a candidate. He is tempted, especially as his term of office draws near its end, to direct his administration mainly with a view to secure popular favour. Thus, instead of statesmen we have electioneers as Presidents. . . .

A second amendment needed in our Constitution, is one which shall involve the rescinding of the clause conferring upon the President the power of dismissing government *employees* indiscriminately at his pleasure. There are some officers that ought to be subject to his control, but they are only a few. The practice of dismissing all officials at every change of government is a most



prolific source of mischief. . . .

Another mistake in our Constitution and laws is the arrangement which causes several months to elapse between the election of the President and his inauguration—from May to January—which gives his predecessor, if he be of an opposing party, a long time during which to carry out his party's views. Our arrangement is alarmingly defective, for instead of four months as in the United States, we allow fully eight months to the dissentient minority to carry out their purposes. This is a defect that calls loudly for immediate remedy.

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These changes . . . depend upon the will of the people; but we must remember that the people cannot be browbeaten into them. They have to be reasoned with and convinced by patient and persevering argument. The enterprise of persuading and convincing them deserves the utmost exertion of true patriots. The reward with which such efforts will be crowned is no less than the emancipation of the body politic from fatally injurious influences and the introduction among us of salutary conditions of national existence, under which we may go on prospering and to prosper.

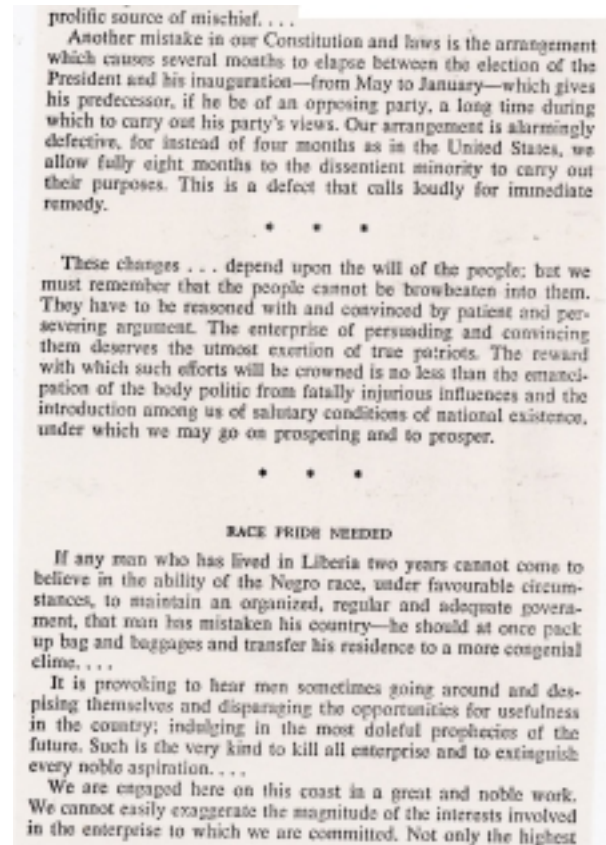
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#### RACE PRIDE NEEDED

If any man who has lived in Liberia two years cannot come to believe in the ability of the Negro race, under favourable circumstances, to maintain an organized, regular and adequate government, that man has mistaken his country—he would at once pack up bag and baggages and transfer his residence to a more congenial clime. . . .

It is provoking to hear men sometimes going around and despising themselves and disparaging the opportunities for usefulness in the country; indulging in the most doleful prophecies of the future. Such is the very kind to kill all enterprise and to extinguish every noble aspiration. . . .

We are engaged here on this coast in a grate and noble work. We cannot easily exaggerate the magnitude of the interests involved in the enterprise to which we are committed. Not only the highest



welfare of the few thousands who now compose the Republic, but the character of a whole race is implicated in what we are doing. Let us then endeavour to rise up to the “height of this great argument”. . . . Something has been done; but what is the little we have achieved compared to what has still to be done! The little of the past dwindles into insignificance before the mighty work of the future.

We are more eagerly watched than we have any idea of. The nations are looking to see whether “order and law, religion and morality, the rights of conscience, the rights of persons, the rights of property, may all be secured” by a government controlled entirely and purely by Negroes. Oh, let us not by any unwise actions compel them to decide in the negative.

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#### GROWTH OF NATIONALISM

The tendency among the nations now seem to be to group themselves according to natural affinities of sentiment and race. Witness the struggles in Italy—the dreams of Mazzini and Garibaldi, with reference to the unification of that country. Germany is striving after consolidation. The same principle is at work in Hungary, and the visions of Kossuth may yet be realized. Even Poland is feeling for the same thing; and the mysterious Fenian movement is significant. In the Western World Mexico and Santo Domingo are determined to assert and protect their unity and freedom. The tendency in that direction is seen everywhere. . . .

Here is a land adapted to us . . . peculiarly ours to the exclusion of alien races. . . .

We have made a fair beginning. . . . Here we are, with all our unfavourable antecedents, still, after eighteen years of struggle, an independent nation. We have the germ of an African empire. Let us, fellow-citizens, guard the trust committed to our hands. The tribes in the distant interior are waiting for us. We have made some impression on the coast; . . . we shall make wider and deeper impressions. . . .

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