

The Dark Continent has found its beacon of light

Monday, April 6th 2009, 4:00 AM

There is a line in the blues in which the singer claims to wear a rainbow around his shoulder. The sterling and largely unprecedented combination of success and honesty brought to [Liberia](#) by [President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf](#) after 14 years of civil war and seemingly indomitable corruption, deserves to be described as a rainbow of hope for a better African future.

As the first woman president in [Africa](#), Sirleaf governs in illuminating contrast to what is thought to be almost surely inevitable in African regimes.

Sirleaf proves two things: American aid can get it right and so can African leadership. The ruthless leadership of [Zimbabwe](#) under [Robert Mugabe](#) (who seems to be trying to live up to his Hitler-like mustache), the genocidal slaughters of [Rwanda](#), and the almost unremittingly corrupt or inept regimes are not inevitable. All can be done better when [America](#) picks the right people to throw its considerable weight behind.

Given all that we read in the news, in African novels, see in documentaries or observe in our travels, we can be startled by the obvious vitality of the morale in Africa. I am sure that the feeling of optimism brought by Sirleaf is part of the hope that she has brought to power.

The subject of hope forever remains before us because morale is absolutely essential to life. It elevates us from the meaningless state of the flesh-and-blood machine by giving our existence vitality beyond the equally essential, but easily soulless, will to live.

We are taken off guard by African morale because there seems to be so little chance of the various African people experiencing anything other than brutality, corruption, deprivation and absolute disdain for their individuality as human beings. So the dirty little secret about post-colonial Africa is that there is so little dirt that remains secret.

All of these years, after emerging from colonial bondage, the hard fact is that Africa's troubles, country by country, are the result of no people other than those who are in charge. Africa's so-called leaders have done such terrible jobs at modernizing their countries and holding onto the vital elements of the past in order to make updating much more than mere imitation of external models.

That is why Sirleaf is such an affirmative surprise. Not only has she taken to cleaning up Liberian corruption and incompetence, she is able to acknowledge - without reservation - how much the support of the Bush administration meant to the new version of Africa that she and her team are bringing through the microcosm of Liberia.

As they say, even a broken clock has the right time twice a day.

Liberia was established in 1847 by former American slaves who looked upon the indigenous population as 19th century Europeans might have looked upon fellow Europeans from the Middle Ages. Not favorably.

A complex democratic history that rolled on while surrounded by colonized powers was put on hold when [Samuel Doe](#) rose from the army and led a coup in 1980. He was eventually deposed by other dictatorial forces as the monster known as [Charles Taylor](#) rose to a presidency that ran the country so terribly that only one building in the nation's capital had electricity.

When Taylor was felled by the will of the Liberian people, Sirleaf was elected president and has done a brilliant job since. Sirleaf continues polishing, with her actions and achievements, the invisible jewel of morale and setting standards by which the rest of Africa may some day be judged.

crouch.stanley@gmail.com