

# ECLIPSED

Welcome to  
Center Theatre Group  
and *Eclipsed* by  
Danaï Gurira.

This new play explores the strength of women caught in the crossfire of Liberia's Civil War. The play is a chilling, humanizing and surprisingly funny portrait of transformation and renewal.

Before we tell you more, take a moment to think about Liberia. What, if anything, do you already know about it? Where is it? What do you think it is like to be a teenager in Liberia? What do they eat and drink? What music do they listen to? What clothes do they wear? What do they dream about? Do you imagine their life is very different than yours or very much the same?

Turn the page to explore *Eclipsed*—the setting, the subject matter and the artists involved. Learn about the connection between Liberia and the United States. See if you can make sense of the almost twenty years of civil war that Liberia has endured. Read an interview with playwright Danaï Gurira and discover her inspiration to write this play. Connect the subject of the play—what happens to women during war, and the strength it takes to survive—to current events worldwide. Ask yourself, why use theatre to tell this story? How can theatre help us understand one another?

Theatre raises questions and challenges audience members to discover their own answers. See what questions these materials raise for you and what answers the performance may provide. Thank you for joining us for *Eclipsed*. We look forward to seeing you at the theatre!

By Danaï Gurira  
Directed by Robert O'Hara  
September 13-October 18, 2009  
Kirk Douglas Theatre

About 44% of Liberians are younger than age 15. In the U.S., about 25% of the population is younger than age 18.

## *Eclipsed* by Danai Gurira

Scene selection reprinted with permission.

*(Number Two enters from the other side of the compound, sharply dressed in tight jeans, a slinky top and a bandana, her AK 47 rifle slung snugly over her shoulder, she carries a sack of rice)*

**Number Three:** Whot you doin ere?  
**Number Two:** Where I supposed to be?  
**Number Three:** Somewhere doing some stupid ting.  
**Number Two:** I a soldier and dis an army camp so where else am I supposed to be?  
**Number Three:** You no soldier.  
**Number Two:** Whot?  
**Number Three:** I say you no soldier, you a wife like us.  
**Number Two:** I woz a wife like you. Den I wake up.

What do you think is happening?  
What will happen next?  
Try saying the lines aloud.

### The Title

Why do you think Danai Gurira titled her play *Eclipsed*?  
What feelings or images come to mind when you hear the word?  
What is an eclipse?  
What does it mean to be eclipsed?

### Discovery Guide

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# About this Production

Given their limited options—remain under the direct control of a soldier who abuses them, fight for the rebel army, or risk life in the crossfire of war-ravaged Liberia—these women must choose which makes the most sense for them in the midst of a senseless war.



Set Design Sketch by Sibyl Wickersheimer

### Set Design

Compare the set design model with the photograph of Liberia. Notice how set designer Sibyl Wickersheimer has chosen to bring this world to life.

## Synopsis

Danai Gurira's play, *Eclipsed*, takes place in the West African country of Liberia in 2003. The setting is a dilapidated shelter, which serves as an army camp for the rebel group called Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy, or LURD. Liberia has been engulfed in years of civil war as rebel groups battle the government army of President Charles Taylor for power. We meet two young Liberian women who have been forcefully taken as "wives," number one and three by a Commanding Officer (C.O.) the audience never meets. The women are helping care for a 15-year-old-girl, referred to alternately as "The Girl" or "Number Four", who has also been kidnapped and is made the C.O.'s fourth wife. The Girl misses her family, but her only option now seems to be to resign herself to her new life in the army camp. Soon, the C.O.'s "second wife", returns from the battlefield, where she is fighting as a soldier in the LURD rebel army. Number Two, who has adopted the name "Disgruntled", tries to convince The Girl to leave the abusive C.O. and to become a soldier with her. Meanwhile, Rita, a woman working for the peace organization called the Liberian Women's Initiative, makes an unauthorized visit to the camp, in hopes of finding her missing daughter among the women being held captive by LURD's warlords. Given their limited options—remain under the direct control of a soldier who abuses them, fight for the rebel army, or risk life in the crossfire of war-ravaged Liberia—these women must choose which makes the most sense for them in the midst of a senseless war.



Liberia, photo from *Long Story Bit by Bit, Liberia Retold*; PHOTO BY TIM HETHERINGTON.



● The Liberian flag was inspired by the U. S. flag.

## Liberian Flag

Both flags are red, white, and blue. In the top left corner of the Liberian flag is a blue square with a single white five-point star in the center. The star represents Liberia being the first republic in Africa. Much like the stripes on the U.S. flag, there are eleven horizontal stripes alternating between red and white to represent the eleven original signers of Liberia's Declaration of Independence.

# L

## Liberia's Founding

● The country gets its name from the Latin word "liber" meaning "free." It was founded as a colony for re-settled, former American slaves.

In 1821, the first official settlement of settlers from America was established on Cape Mesurado, in present-day Liberia.

In 1824, the settlement on Cape Mesurado was named Monrovia, in honor of U.S. President James Monroe. The colony was named Liberia. The U.S. Congress funded the colony.

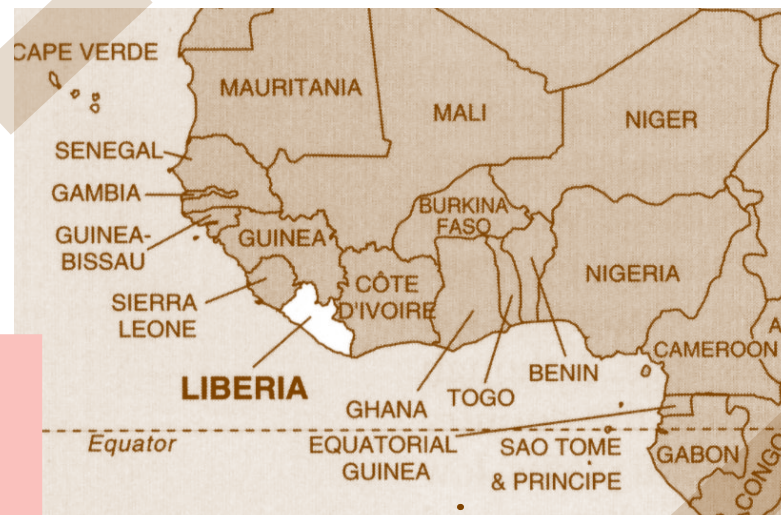
On July 26, 1847, Liberia proclaimed independence from the U.S. and the group that helped found the colony, the American Colonization Society—without starting war. The U.S. Declaration of Independence served as model for Liberia's own Declaration of Independence, as did the constitution and the new government. Just like in the U.S., Liberia's government was a republic with three separate branches—legislative, executive, and judicial—where the people elected representatives and a president. Liberia became the first independent republic in Africa.

*"Liberia and America de same oh! Liberia started by America!" — Eclipsed*

● Liberia is home to about 3.3 million people.

## Where is it?

The Republic of Liberia is located on the west coast of Africa just a few degrees north of the Equator, bordered by Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast). Liberia is approximately the size of the state of Virginia. Liberia is home to about 3.3 million people. Most of the population live in urban areas, particularly in and around the capital city of Monrovia.



## Americo-Liberians and Indigenous People

● The descendents of the freed American slaves in Liberia are called the Americo-Liberians.



Photo from *Liberia: Modern Nations of the World*; BY DEBRA MILLER.

The descendents of the freed American slaves in Liberia are called the Americo-Liberians. The Americo-Liberians maintained close ties with their American cultural heritage, bringing with them American customs and architecture, where churches and houses resembled those from the American South. Since the early days as a colony, tension remained among the Americo-Liberians and the indigenous people. Though the settlers left America to escape racial discrimination, they did not consider themselves "African", and looked down on the indigenous people. While the indigenous people vastly outnumbered the Americo-Liberians, the Americo-Liberians controlled the economy, access to education, and politics. Only Americo-Liberian men over the age of 21 were given the right to vote. The indigenous people were obligated to pay taxes to the Liberian government, and they were commonly forced to work as laborers, or slaves, for the Americo-Liberian elite. By law and social practice, the indigenous people of Liberia were second-class citizens in their own land.



## Roots of the Civil Wars

1971

Popular Liberian president, William V.S. Tubman dies, after 27 years in office. Tubman's successor is the corrupt former vice president, William Tolbert Jr.

1979

President Tolbert raises the price of rice, a staple food in Liberia. Tolbert's government attacks non-violent protestors, causing the violent "Rice Riot".

1980

Master Sergeant Samuel Doe leads a military coup and President Tolbert and thirteen members of his cabinet are publicly executed.

Doe suspends the constitution and makes himself president.

1985

Doe wins fraudulent election.

1989

Former Doe government official, Charles Taylor, leads the rebel force called the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) against the government. Charles Taylor's attacks in southern Liberia starts the "Great War". Liberians also call this World War One or The First Civil War (not to be confused with the World War One of 1914–1918).

The NPFL rebels take control of Monrovia.

1990

A group of leaders from other countries in West Africa form the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in order to address the civil war in Liberia. ECOWAS sends in a peacekeeping force.

Rebels breach President Doe's security, and Doe is tortured and executed.

1995

ECOWAS helps create a peace treaty and makes plans to hold elections. More fighting breaks the treaty.

1997

Charles Taylor wins a legitimate presidential election with over 70% of the vote. ECOWAS forces withdraw from Liberia.

1999

The anti-Charles Taylor rebel group, Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), is founded.

LURD forces attack the Liberian town of Voinjama, displacing 25,000 Liberians, beginning a second civil war.

2000

Under the command of Charles Taylor, Liberian government forces launch an offensive against LURD and other rebel groups in Northern Liberia.

2001

The United Nations places an embargo against Liberia for Charles Taylor's involvement in conflicts in the other West African countries.

Taylor is accused of providing weapons to rebels in neighboring Sierra Leone in exchange for diamonds.

2002

As a result of fighting between rebel groups, and the deaths of ten of thousands of Liberians, Charles Taylor declares a state of emergency.

Over half of Liberia's population is displaced to surrounding countries and within Liberia.

Rebels and the government recruit upwards of 10,000-15,000 young people under the age 15 to fight.

2003

March – The Liberian Women's Initiative (LWI) works with other peace groups to organize anti-war protests. The women in the LWI talk directly to soldiers and warlords to try and get them to negotiate peacefully.

April – Most of Liberia, including the capital city of Monrovia, is under the control of LURD.

June/July – Leaders meet in Ghana for peace talks between Taylor's government and rebel forces. The agreement fails and fighting continues.

International Criminal Court indicts Charles Taylor for alleged war crimes in Sierra Leone.

Many Liberians expect the U.S. to come to the aid of its oldest African ally, but with most U.S. troops either in Iraq or Afghanistan, the U.S. does not send the expected military aid.

August – United Nations Security Council allows ECOWAS to send peacekeeping troops to Liberia.

Charles Taylor seeks asylum in Nigeria.

Rebel and government forces enter a comprehensive peace agreement that requires the National Transitional Government of Liberia to maintain peace so that a proper democratic election can be held in 2005.

2005

Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, a political rival of Charles Taylor in the 1997 election and peace activist, is elected as the first woman to head an African state.

2007

Charles Taylor's trial for accusations of committing war crimes in Sierra Leone begins at the International Criminal Court in The Hague, The Netherlands and is ongoing as of 2009.

2009

Under President Johnson-Sirleaf, Liberia continues the slow process of recovery and redevelopment.

*"I...I no know who I is out of war."*  
— Eclipsed

## Interview with Danai Gurira



A phone conversation between Danai Gurira and Center Theatre Group Teaching Artist Marcos Najera

**Q. Marcos Najera:** Thank you for taking the time to talk with Center Theatre Group's Education department. We are excited

to have you join us in Los Angeles. I want to start by asking how you, Danai, describe yourself as an artist.

**A. Danai Gurira:**

Wow. Big question. Being an artist for me is about responding and being obedient to a calling. It really wasn't what I planned or what I envisioned as I grew up. But it emerged as my talent and my joy. And so it became what I decided to allow myself to do. And thankfully, because it's a calling, it's attached to a sense of fulfillment. Because I'm a dramatist and an actor and a playwright it involves the telling of stories in very dramatic ways. So for acting, it's physical storytelling. For writing, it's a story on the page. It's telling stories that are resonant and effective and allow true human dynamics that are specific and constantly universal to be revealed in a dramatic setting. And, of course, ultimately, it involves levels of entertainment. The artistry I strive for is a full meal. It's the nutrients; the nutrients are there, but also something really sweet. Everything is on the plate. But ultimately, it's also to tell untold stories. Because I'm a Zimbabwean-American, being very much American, but having grown up in a Zimbabwean family, I'm about telling stories that I don't feel told enough in my western environment, which are stories of African women. That's a driving force behind the work that I do.

**That's a wonderful way to describe what a playwright and an actress does. It makes me wonder what inspired you to write *Eclipsed*?**

It was something very new to me. I'd never really delved into the stories of Liberia. I didn't know much about Liberia. My knowledge of Liberia was very surface for the most part. But when I saw a picture of Liberian women during the final bout of the war in 2003 on the cover of *The New York Times*, it was women who were rebel fighters, the way they were dressed, they were dressed just like how I dress! You know, and looking kind of funky and cool, but they had AK-47's slung behind their backs. What is this? What is the story, what are the stories behind these eyes? Because my natural passion is towards telling African women's stories, I was instantly drawn in. I just wanted to know. I wanted to learn. I wanted to try and tell their story if I could.

**And when you traveled to Liberia to interview these women, was there one question or a set of questions that you always asked?**

Actually there were. The interesting thing and the tricky thing about the whole story of rebel fighters, specifically, is that not everyone is outward about what they did during the war. Or post the war. There's a lot of stigma that goes with what being a fighter in the war meant. How these women stepped out of the realm of the societal concepts of a woman and they turned into soldiers. And now that the war is over, a lot of people aren't always willing to talk openly about what they did during the war and who they were. I know people think you go 'Gosh, you were a soldier, how cool, tell us about it.' It doesn't work that way there. I just wanted them to tell what they felt they needed to tell, that they felt compelled to share. And so the thing I always asked them in the beginning

was 'Tell me about the moment when the war came to you.' Because the thing that kept striking me was people would be at school, at home, at church, you know, getting water at the river, whatever they were doing and suddenly their whole lives changed.

**From your perspective, why should American young men watch and hear this play (about African women)?** It's always important to embrace the "other". Because we are in a society where there are elements of privilege, there are people's stories that are told more than others. We know some people receive less respect. We know that happens in race. But that also happens in gender. And there are aspects of masculine power that get to be more dominant in society than feminine power. It allows young men to become better young men if they are really able to embrace the perspective and the experiences of the "other".

**Despite the really difficult stories we hear in *Eclipsed* and, of course, the true horrors that women in Liberia have experienced during their young country's history, Liberia elected a female president. They did it even before America did. Does that strike you as ironic?** Yes and no. You know, honestly I always think there are tons of things African women can teach the world. I've grown up around them and I see how they navigate, survive and thrive. And so it's not that surprising that they figured that out. Of course it was a really dire set of circumstances that led women to stand up during the peace missions that led Liberia out of war. Seeing how men have really abolished the country, there is no other way to look at it, the men demolished the country and these women saved it. It was clear that Liberians, they'd had enough, and they needed something really, really, really different. And looking to her as the answer, that difference, was wise, and just made a lot of sense. I think America is capable of doing it pretty soon, or well, it's coming. There will be a female President in America, it's a matter of who and when.

**Danai, did your definition of the word 'survivor' change while you were writing *Eclipsed*?**

Ah, interesting, interesting. Ah, yes, yes. As I researched and the more I got more in-depth with the characters and the story, it became more and more uncomfortable. That's always a good thing, I think, for an artist. As my teachers told me in grad school, the best place to create is from where you are uncomfortable, where it gets complicated. What I kept learning is that surviving involved many, many aspects. Survival involves choices. They are not choices that we could look at and say 'Oh, that's a great choice,' you know? So it definitely evolved, my concept of survival and how women navigate a war zone in order to survive by the choices they consequently make. There in such a vicious terrain. How they become products of their environments—but it's all in the pursuit of survival.

**Danai, we are so looking forward to you sharing your work in Los Angeles. Thank you for taking the time before your jump on your flight!**

No worries. Thanks again. I'll see you all there! ●

**I saw a picture of Liberian women during the final bout of the war in 2003 on the cover of *The New York Times*, it was women who were rebel fighters...** — Danai Gurira



# What is the story behind these eyes?

AP Images, PHOTO BY SAURABH DAS

**"I honestly had never seen such an image in my life: feminine, glamorous, intimidating, powerful, belligerent and African."**

— Danai Gurira

## Danai's Inspiration

Some of the most feared fighters during Liberia's 1989–2003 civil war were women, including rebel fighter Black Diamond (pictured above, center).

- What is the story in this photograph? Focus on one of the women.
- What is she thinking or feeling at this moment? If she could speak, what would she say?

## Inspiration. Interviews. Imagination. Interpretation. Inspiration.



CAST PHOTOS BY CRAIG SCHWARTZ.

- Look at the faces of the women on these pages. All of them are essential to the creation of *Eclipsed*.
- Black Diamond whose photograph was the initial inspiration.
- Danai Gurira, the playwright, who interviewed Liberian women and then shared their stories through theatre.
- Kelly M. Jenrette, Miriam F. Glover, Michael Hyatt, Bahni Turpin, Edwina Findley, the actors who interpret the script and bring these characters to life onstage.
- And imagine the faces we don't see—the many Liberian women who courageously shared their stories of survival.

## By any other name...

**What is your name, the one your family give you?** — Rita, *Eclipsed*

The ritual of naming is the most important way in which an individual can establish an identity in Liberian culture. Among both the traditional ethnic tribes and the Americo-Liberians, the naming of someone has great spiritual and philosophical importance. Liberians believe that one's name determines that individual's behavior and characteristics.

- Think about your own name. Where did it come from? What does it mean? How well does your name "fit" you? If you were going to rename yourself, what name would you chose and why? What would happen if your name were taken away? Would you lose your identity?

### Cast of Characters



Edwina Findley  
Number Three



Bahni Turpin  
Number One



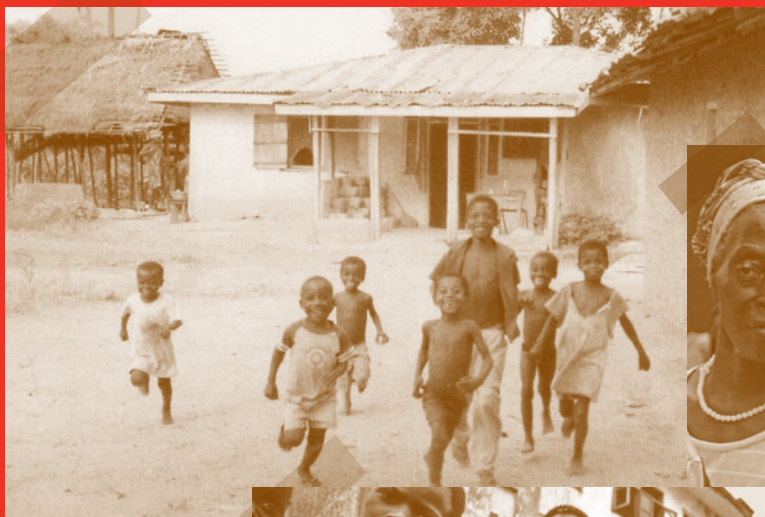
Miriam F. Glover  
The Girl



Kelly M. Jenrette  
Number Two



Michael Hyatt  
Rita



*“Tell me about the moment when the war came to you.”*  
 — Danai Gurira

Photo from *Liberia: Modern Nations of the World*; by DEBRA MILLER.



## About Us

CENTER THEATRE GROUP'S MISSION is to serve the diverse audiences of Los Angeles by producing and presenting theatre of the highest caliber, by nurturing new artists, by attracting new audiences, and by developing youth outreach and education programs. This mission is based on the belief that the art of theatre is a cultural force with the capacity to transform the lives of individuals and society at large.

### Education and Engagement

THEATRE IS AN ENDURING and powerful tool for communicating ideas, stories, emotions and beliefs that fuel the intellect, imagination and creative spirit. Center Theatre Group believes that stimulating awareness, creativity, dialogue and an inquisitive mind is integral to the growth and well-being of the individual and the community; and that nurturing a life-long appreciation of the arts leads inextricably to an engaged and enlightened society.

**Center Theatre Group's education and engagement programs advance the organization's mission in three key ways:**

- Audiences:** Inspiring current and future audiences to discover theatre and its connection to their lives
- Artists:** Investing in the training, support and development of emerging, young artists and young arts professionals who are the future of our field; and
- Leadership:** Contributing to the community-wide efforts to improve the quality and scope of arts education in Los Angeles.

### Performing for Los Angeles Youth (P.L.A.Y.)

- Leslie K. Johnson, Director of Education and Outreach
- Debra Piver, Associate Director of Education
- Traci Cho, Interim Director of School Partnerships
- Patricia Garza, Department Manager
- Dan Harper, Educational Programs Associate
- Shaunté Caraballo, Educational Services Coordinator
- Janine Salinas, Assistant to the Director of Education and Outreach

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Performing for Los Angeles Youth receives generous support from the Center Theatre Group Affiliates, a volunteer organization dedicated to bringing innovative theatre and creative education to the young people of Los Angeles.

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*Eclipsed* received an Edgerton Foundation New American Plays Award for its world premiere at the Woolly Mammoth Theatre.



Center Theatre Group Affiliates

