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Firestone: Crises Across the Decades

“Do I think they have blood on their hands? Yes. I believe they facilitated a warlord in his insurrection and in the atrocities that he created. Sometimes people make decisions they regret. I don’t know if Firestone regrets the decisions they made in Liberia during the insurrection. You may want to ask them that question.”

— Gerald S. Rose, deputy chief of mission (1991-93) for the U.S. Embassy in Liberia¹

Firestone’s decision to remain in Liberia was very costly for the company. The company continues to rebuild, but along with its Liberian employees Firestone was able to preserve an important economic asset for Liberia, and we are proud of that.

— Firestone press release²

Emma Sanchezⁱ could not help but smile as she pushed a recent copy of *The Wall Street Journal* to the corner of her desk. As president and managing director of Firestone Liberia, Sanchez was extremely proud of Firestone’s success in keeping its employees and their families healthy during the Ebola crisis. *The Wall Street Journal* lavished praise on Sanchez and the company with its article “Liberian Rubber Farm Becomes Sanctuary Against Ebola”³ and kudos from NGOs and governments around the world began to pour in. Firestone Liberia was a leading employer in the West African nation, supplying comparatively well-paying jobs, housing, education, and healthcare to thousands of people near the country’s capital, Monrovia.⁴ Sanchez, along with her management team, had developed a multi-faceted approach to preventing and treating the disease as well as educating Firestone employees and all those living on its grounds about the epidemic. Compared to other private organizations in the region and West African governments, Firestone’s approach was extremely successful.

Sanchez glanced down at her desk at the newspaper clippings, reports, and memos until one headline from *The New York Times* caught her eye: “Bodies Pile Up, but Business Goes On.”⁵ Sanchez scanned the article. This was not a grim take on Firestone’s handling of the Ebola crisis. Instead it was an article on a subject Firestone executives thought they had long moved past: Charles Taylor.

i Emma Sanchez is a pseudonym and a fictionalized character. She was created for class discussion purposes and is not meant to depict a specific person within the Firestone organization.