

Book Review for *Black Man's Grave: Letters From Sierra Leone* by Gary Stewart and John Amman

For Immediate Release

In early May 2000, the impoverished patch of West African coast known as Sierra Leone began to intrude upon the world's consciousness. Fragments of the Revolutionary United Front, a notoriously cruel band of rebels, captured several hundred United Nations peacekeepers and threatened Sierra Leone's capital, Freetown. The British sent in troops and CNN sent a camera crew, bringing the fighting into parlors around the globe. By then Sierra Leoneans had been fighting each other in near obscurity for almost a decade.

As the authors—both of whom were Peace Corps Volunteers—tell it, Sierra Leone was ripe for revolution; the RUF just didn't know how to pull it off. They present the story of this tragic "revolution" through the eyes of those who struggled to survive in the small northern village of Fadugu. Based on years of correspondence and the authors' research and experiences in Sierra Leone, *Black Man's Grave* describes a country run by a greedy political elite who hijacked a fledgling democracy, plundered its wealth of diamonds, and turned most of its people into desperate paupers.

In an offshoot of Sierra Leone's suffering, links between its diamonds and al Qaeda are now being traced. The deeds of al Qaeda, wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and troubles in myriad other hot spots have kindled interest, among Americans, Britons, and other "first world" citizens, in places once seldom heard of. *Black Man's Grave* helps us understand the frustrations that simmer throughout much of the world and threaten a peaceful future for all.

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