HAPPY INDEPENDENCE DAY, SIERRA LEONE!
In honor of today's celebration, let's walk through Sierra Leone's history.
PRE-COLONIAL SOCIETIES

Many of the tribal groups that make up today's population were already settled well before the Europeans' arrival. One of the largest groups, then and today, the Mende, were settled in West Africa as early as 4,000 B.C.
SINCE THE 11TH CENTURY, TRADE ROUTES IN THE REGION LINKED ALL OF WEST AFRICA. AS EUROPEANS COLONIZED THE REGION, THESE TRADE ROUTES DISAPPEARED DUE TO SEPARATE EUROPEAN STATES LIMITING TRADE WITH ONE ANOTHER.
THE PORTUGUESE & TRANS-ATLANTIC TRADING

The Portuguese were the first to establish trading posts in West Africa in the 1400s, with their main post being in what is today known as Port Loko on the coast of Sierra Leone.
THE SLAVE TRADE

BY THE 1550S, THE DEMAND FOR SLAVES IN THE AMERICAS HAD INCREASED SO MUCH, THAT SLAVES BECAME THE MOST COMMON EXPORT FROM WEST AFRICA. ISLANDS ALONG THE COAST, INCLUDING TODAY’S BUNCE ISLAND, WERE BASES FOR EUROPEAN SLAVE TRADERS.
IN 1787, THE BRITISH ESTABLISHED THE SETTLEMENT OF "THE PROVENCE OF FREEDOM." THIS WAS A SETTLEMENT OF FORMER SLAVES FROM NORTH AMERICA. TODAY, THIS AREA IS KNOWN AS FREETOWN, THE COUNTRY'S CAPITAL.
BY 1800, THE BRITISH WERE USING SIERRA LEONE AS THE "CAPITAL" OF THEIR PRESENCE THROUGHOUT WEST AFRICA. FOR THE NEXT 150+ YEARS, SIERRA LEONE WOULD REMAIN COLONIZED BY THE BRITISH.
ON THIS DAY IN 1961, SIERRA LEONE GAINED INDEPENDENCE FROM THE BRITISH. AS AN INDEPENDENT NATION, SIERRA LEONE HELD GENERAL ELECTIONS, CREATED A PARLIAMENT, AND DRAFTED ITS FIRST CONSTITUTION.
IN 1991, CIVIL WAR BROKE OUT WHEN AN ATTEMPTED COUP SUPPORTED BY LIBERIAN REBELS FAILED. THE CIVIL WAR LASTED 11 YEARS, ENGULFED THE ENTIRE COUNTRY, AND LEFT OVER 50,000 SIERRA LEONEANS DEAD.
TODAY, SIERRA LEONE IS A FUNCTIONING DEMOCRACY, HAS A POPULATION OF OVER 7 MILLION PEOPLE, AND RANKS 5TH AS THE MOST PEACEFUL COUNTRY IN AFRICA, ACCORDING TO THE 2020 GLOBAL PEACE INDEX.