Poignant, Exquisitely Crafted Book Of World Affairs And Personal Homecoming

Helene Cooper is Congo, a descendant of two Liberian dynasties -- traced back to the first ship of freemen that set sail from New York in 1820 to found Monrovia. Helene grew up at Sugar Beach, a twenty-two-room mansion by the sea. Her childhood was filled with servants, flashy cars, a villa in Spain, and a farmhouse up-country. It was also an African childhood, filled with knock foot games and hot pepper soup, heartmen and neegee. When Helene was eight, the Coopers took in a foster child -- a common custom among the Liberian elite. Eunice, a Bassa girl, suddenly became known as Mrs. Cooper's daughter. For years the Cooper daughters -- Helene, her sister Marlene, and Eunice -- blissfully enjoyed the trappings of wealth and advantage. But Liberia was like an unwatched pot of water left boiling on the stove. And on April 12, 1980, a group of soldiers staged a coup détat, assassinating President William Tolbert and executing his cabinet. The Coopers and the entire Congo class were now the hunted, being imprisoned, shot, tortured, and raped. After a brutal daylight attack by a ragtag crew of soldiers, Helene, Marlene, and their mother fled Sugar Beach, and then Liberia, for America. They left Eunice behind. A world away, Helene tried to assimilate as an American teenager. At the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill she found her passion in journalism, eventually becoming a reporter for the Wall Street Journal and the New York Times. She reported from every part of the globe -- except Africa -- as Liberia descended into war-torn, third-world hell. In 2003, a near-death experience in Iraq convinced Helene that Liberia -- and Eunice -- could wait no longer. At once a deeply personal memoir and an examination of a violent and stratified country, The House at Sugar Beach tells of tragedy, forgiveness, and transcendence with unflinching honesty and a survivor's gentle humor. And at its heart, it is a story of Helene Cooper's long voyage home.

My Personal Review:
Helene Cooper grew up in Liberia, the African country founded by freed American slaves in the early 19th century. The founders established themselves as a privileged class, into which Helene Cooper was born, a wealthy internationally-sophisticated little girl in an impoverished nation. When she was 13, her world was torn apart by violent, tribal anarchy. After her education in the U.S. she became a reporter for the Wall Street Journal, and then after traveling the world, returned to her homeland. The book ends with a poignant scene of homecoming, one of the best I've seen in any memoir. The story is driven by the hopes of the protagonist, and the dynamic tension between nations and races. It offers insights into human dynamics and world history I didn't even know I didn't know. I'm glad I came across it and read it. It's a wonderful book that I highly recommend. I read the audio book which includes some lovely oral language arts, as Helene offers colorful samples of Liberian English.

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The House at Sugar Beach: In Search of a Lost African Childhood by Helene Cooper - 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price!