During the 20th century, the US developed a unique kind of empire, one bound together less by military conquest and direct political administration than by the expansion of markets, corporate influence, and cultural exchange. The ties between the US and Liberia, cemented in the 1920s when the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company successfully established a major rubber plantation in the country, exemplify this new imperial relationship. Through a focus on the Harvard African Expedition to Liberia in 1926, this talk investigates the relationships among science, business, and the state in the economic transformation of nature and a nation.