

Nigerian history at a glance

Attempts to unite the Nigerian people behind a common flag can hardly succeed without a deep analysis and appreciation of the rich and challenging history of the country. Since many of us hardly have time to read extensive documentations, we have produced a rundown of major events that shaped Nigeria and continue to impact developments in our country today.

To understand where we are heading, it is crucial that we appreciate our origins and how far we have come. This summarised account of Nigerian history is based on extracts from Historyworld.net, Infoplease.com, countrystudies.us/nigeria/5.htm and other sources. Accounts on major developments in Nigerian history have been reproduced in the authors' own words to maintain their originality and meaning.

Since we are not sure how much time you have at hand to read the full length of this documentation, we thought it wise and helpful to arm you with an important information to start with. Let it be known that way before the arrival of the colonial powers, the present day Nigeria was home to a number of sophisticated and influential societies. "Among the most important were the north-eastern kingdom of Borno, the Hausa city-state/kingdoms of Katsina, Kano, Zaria, and Gobir in northern-central Nigeria, the Yoruba city-states/kingdoms of Ife, Oyo, and Ijebu in south-western Nigeria, the southern kingdom of Benin, and the Igbo communities / Nri Kingdom of eastern Nigeria. Extensive trading networks developed among these societies and northwards across the Sahara" (iss.co.za).

Yoruba Kingdom

The Yoruba are of mix origin and the dominant group on the west bank of the River Niger. The "Yoruba were organized in patrilineal descent groups that occupied village communities and subsisted on agriculture, but from about the eleventh century A.D., adjacent village compounds, called *ife*, began to coalesce into a number of territorial city-states in which loyalties to the clan became subordinate to allegiance to a dynastic chieftain. This transition produced an urbanized political and social environment that was accompanied by a high level of artistic achievement, particularly in terracotta and ivory sculpture and in the sophisticated metal casting produced at Ife. The brass and bronze used by Yoruba artisans was a significant item of trade, made from copper, tin, and zinc either imported from North Africa or from mines in the Sahara and northern Nigeria.

Ife was the center of as many as 400 religious cults whose traditions were manipulated to political advantage by the *Oni* (king) in the days of the kingdom's greatness. Ife also lay at the centre of a trading network with the north. The *Oni* supported his court with tolls levied on trade, tribute exacted from dependencies, and tithes due him as a religious leader. The *Oni* was chosen on a rotating basis from one of several branches of the ruling dynasty, which was composed of a clan with several thousand members. Once elected, he went into seclusion in the palace compound and was not seen again by his people. Below the *Oni* in the state hierarchy were palace officials, town chiefs, and the rulers of outlying dependencies. The palace officials were spokesmen for the *Oni* and the rulers of dependencies who had their own subordinate officials. All offices, even that of the *Oni*, were elective and depended on broad support within the community. Each official was chosen from among the eligible clan members who had hereditary right to the office. Members of the royal dynasty often were assigned to govern dependencies, while the sons of palace officials assumed lesser roles as functionaries, bodyguards to the *Oni*, and judges" (<http://countrystudies.us/nigeria/5.htm>).

The Ife model of government was adapted at Oyo, where a member of its ruling dynasty consolidated several smaller city-states under his control. A council of state, the *Oyo Mesi*, eventually assumed responsibility for naming the *Alafin* (king) from candidates proposed from the ruling dynasty and acted as a check on his authority. Oyo developed as a constitutional monarchy; actual government was in the hands of the *Basorun* (prime minister), who presided over the *Oyo Mesi*. The city was situated 170 kilometers north of Ife, and about 100 kilometers north of present-day Oyo. Unlike the forest-bound Yoruba kingdoms, Oyo was in the savanna and drew its military strength from its cavalry forces, which established hegemony over the adjacent Nupe and the Borgu kingdoms and thereby developed trade routes farther to the north.

Edo Kingdom of Benin

At the peak of its power, the Yorubaland established agricultural communities in the Edo-speaking area east of Ife. By the fifteenth century, Edo Kingdom took an independent course and became a major trading power in its own right, blocking Ife's access to the coastal ports as Oyo had cut off the mother city from the savanna. "Political power and religious authority resided in the *Oba* (king), who according to tradition was descended from the Ife dynasty. The *Oba* was advised by a council of six hereditary chiefs, who also nominated his successor. Responsibility for administering the urban complex lay with sixty trade guilds, each with its own quarter, whose membership cut across clan affiliations and owed its loyalty directly to the *Oba*. At his wooden, steepled palace, the *oba* presided over a large court richly adorned with brass, bronze, and ivory objects. Like Ife and the other Yoruba states, Benin, too, is famous for its sculpture.

Unlike the Yoruba kingdoms, however, Benin developed a centralized regime to oversee the administration of its expanding territories. By the late fifteenth century, Benin was in contact with Portugal. At its apogee in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Benin even encompassed parts of southeastern Yorubaland and the small Igbo area on the western bank of the Niger. Dependencies were governed by members of the royal family who were assigned several towns or villages scattered throughout the realm, rather than a block of territory that could be used as a base for revolt against the *Oba*" (<http://countrystudies.us/nigeria/5.htm>).

Ndi Igbo Communities /Nri Kingdom

The origin of Ndi-Igbo has been a puzzle to historians. However, "majority of Igbos are satisfied to accept the Israel hypothesis supported by the triple testimonies of oral tradition, and the biblical evidence of Eri as a true historical descendant of Israel and the archaeological evidence, some of which are now lodged by Anambra state Government at Igbo-Ukwu Museum". Archaeologists have based their conclusions on Igbo child-naming and the meaning of names assigned at birth. "Naming/circumcision ceremonies, for instance, are as important to the Igbos as they were to the Hebrews of old; one has only to read the Old Testament to note the similarities between Hebrew customs and those of the Igbo in this as in many aspects of life" (Uzoma Onyemaechi, University of Michigan). These Ndi-Igbo attributes are equally reflected in the following historical statement:

"It has become a part of our history that the Igbos have manifested their zest for adventure and industry in their roles as national public servants, educators, captains of industry and commerce, financials [sic] and philanthropists, and have contributed in no small measure both to the emancipation of Nigeria from colonial rule and the progress of developing this country".

General Emeka Ojukwu, 1989

In support of biblical and archaeological positions on the origin of Ndi-Igbo, Mazi Nweke, wrote: "First and foremost, they are adventurous and aggressive like the Jews. The Igbo and Jewish customs permit a man to raise children from his brother's widow. Both the Igbos and the Jews have a common tradition of lengthy funeral ceremony (Genesis 50:1-3). Igbos and the Jews have common circumcision; date on the eight-day following the delivering of a male child. Igbos and the Jews use intermediaries in marriage negotiations, this is practicable in Igboland up till now. Abraham did it while negotiating Rebecca for Isaac (Genesis 24.). Many groups of scholars have the view that the Igbos originated from the Jewish stock. To make this view more acceptable, Olaudah Equiano, an Igbo ex-slave in London, who is said to have travelled widely, happens to be the first person to write about the Igbo tribe before his death in 1797. Equiano, in one of his findings, discovered that some names amongst the Igbos such as Uburu and even the "Igbo" itself are derived from Hebrew words". See <http://www.ndigboswitzerland.org/Docs/ArticlebyMaziNwekeonoriginoftheIgbos.htm>.

Most scholars have argued that Igbo society was "stateless" and that the Igbo region did not evolve centralised political institutions before the colonial period. "According to this theory, the relatively egalitarian Igbo lived in small, self-contained

groups of villages organized according to a lineage system that did not allow social stratification. An individual's fitness to govern was determined by his wisdom and his wisdom by his age and experience. Subsistence farming was the dominant economic activity. Land, obtained through inheritance, was the measure of wealth. Handicrafts and commerce were well developed, and a relatively dense population characterized the region”.

Despite the absence of chiefs and kings, “some Igbo relied on an order of priests, chosen from outsiders on the northern fringe of Igboland, to ensure impartiality in settling disputes between communities. The Igbo stateless theory is however challenged by archaeological evidence pointing to an Nri Kingdom, which appears to have flourished before the seventeenth century. The Nri Kingdom was relatively small in geographical extent, but it is remembered as the cradle of Igbo culture”.

The Northern Kingdoms of the Savanna

“Trade was the key to the emergence of organised communities in the savanna portions of Nigeria. A string of dynastic states, including the earliest Hausa states, stretched across the western and central Sudan. The most powerful of these states were Ghana, Gao, and Kanem, which were not located within the boundaries of present-day Nigeria but which nonetheless had an indirect influence on the history of the Nigerian savanna. Ghana declined in the eleventh century but was succeeded by Mali, which consolidated much of the western Sudan under its imperial rule in the thirteenth century. Songhai emerged as an empire out of the small state of Gao in the fifteenth century. For a century, Songhai paid homage to Mali, but by the last decade of the fifteenth century it attained its independence and brought much of the Malian domains under its imperial sway. Although these western empires had little political influence on the savanna states of Nigeria before 1500, they had a strong cultural and economic impact that became more pronounced in the sixteenth century, especially because these states became associated with the spread of Islam and trade. In the sixteenth century, moreover, much of northern Nigeria paid homage to Songhai in the west or to Borno, a rival empire in the east”.

“Borno's prosperity depended on its stake in the trans-Sudanic slave trade and the desert trade in salt and livestock. The need to protect its commercial interests compelled Borno to intervene in Kanem, which continued to be a theater of war throughout the fifteenth and into the sixteenth centuries. Despite its relative political weakness in this period, Borno's court and mosques under the patronage of a line of scholarly kings earned fame as centres of Islamic culture and learning. By the eleventh century, some of the Hausa states--such as those at Kano, Katsina, and Gobir--had developed into walled towns that engaged in trade and serviced caravans as well as manufactured cloth and leather goods. Millet, sorghum, sugarcane, and cotton were produced in the surrounding countryside, which also provided grazing land for cattle. Until the fifteenth century, the small Hausa states were on the periphery of the major empires of the era”.

“According to tradition, the Hausa rulers descended from a "founding hero" named Bayinjida, supposedly of Middle Eastern origin, who became *sarki* (king) of Daura after subduing a snake and marrying the queen of Daura. Their children founded the other Hausa towns, which traditionally are referred to as the Hausa *bakwai* (Hausa seven). Wedged in among the stronger Sudanic kingdoms, each of the Hausa states acquired special military, economic, or religious functions. No one state dominated the others, but at various times different states assumed a leading role. They were under constant pressure from Songhai to the west and Kanem-Borno to the east, to which they paid tribute. Armed conflict usually was motivated by economic concerns, as coalitions of Hausa states mounted wars, against the Jukun and Nupe in the middle belt to collect slaves, or against one another for control of important trade routes”.

“Fulbe pastoralists, known in Nigeria as Fulani, began to enter the Hausa country in the thirteenth century, and by the fifteenth century they were tending cattle, sheep, and goats in Borno as well. The Fulani came from the Senegal River valley, where their ancestors had developed a method of livestock management and specialization based on transhumance. The movement of cattle along north/south corridors in pursuit of grazing and water followed the climatic pattern of the rainy and dry seasons. Gradually, the pastoralists moved eastward, first into the centers of the Mali and Songhai empires and eventually into Hausaland and Borno”.

“Some Fulbe converted to Islam in the Senegal region as early as the eleventh century, and one group of Muslim Fulani settled in the cities and mingled freely with the Hausa, from whom they became racially indistinguishable. There, they

constituted devoutly religious, educated elite who made themselves indispensable to the Hausa kings as government advisers, Islamic judges, and teachers. Other Fulani, the lighter-skinned pastoral nomads, remained aloof from the Hausa and in some measure from Islam as well, herding cattle outside the cities and seeking pastures for their herds” (<http://countrystudies.us/nigeria/5.htm>).

From these well researched and independent accounts, it is obvious that the make-up of present-day Nigeria already had effective systems of governance, viable economies and a system of checks and balances that were subservient to the cultures and traditions of the peoples prior to the arrival of the British. We have all it takes to emerge a strong and united states of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Let’s speak the truth to each other, right the wrongs and unite behind a common flag. It’s possible. Just believe!

Summarised Historical Events

Dates	Major events
5 th century BC – 20 th century AD	<p>The Nok people inhabited the southern slopes of the Jos Plateau around 5th century BC. Inspired by the Nok culture, the people perfected the art of making the wonderfully expressive terracotta figures with the aid of their newly acquired iron technology. The Kanuri, Hausa, and Fulani peoples subsequently migrated there in the Northern Nigeria.</p> <p>Along the northern frontier of Nigeria and West of Bornu, was the land of the Hausa people. The Hausa tribe was well placed to control trade routes to the forest regions of the south. It developed a number of small but stable kingdoms governed from a strong walled city.</p> <p>The Hausa Kingdoms and Bornu Empire prospered as commercial centres and international trade routes for exchanging “slaves, ivory and kola nuts for salt, glass beads, coral, cloth, weapons, brass rods and cowry shells used as currency”.</p> <p>Between the Hausa kingdoms and the coast and in the savannah grasslands and the forest regions west of the Niger were the dominant tribes of the Yoruba people. They established two powerful states – Ife and Oyo. By reinvesting the profits from trade in the development of forceful army units, the Yoruba kingdom of Oyo grew in strength and developed a high level of political organisation which extended as far as modern day Togo.</p> <p>The best known of all the Nigerian kingdoms was Benin. The Kingdom of Benin, by the 15th and 16th centuries, had “developed an efficient army; an elaborate ceremonial court; and artisans whose works in ivory, wood, bronze, and brass are prized throughout the world today” (Nigeria-planet.com).</p>
AD 1804 - 1903	<p>Living among the Hausa people of the Northern Nigeria were the Fulani tribesmen and their leader Sheikh Usman dan Fodio who grew so passionate of Islam. In 1804 he and his sons led a hugely successful “holy war” against the Moslem rulers of the Hausa Kingdom. This led to the establishment of a Fulani capital in Sokoto in 1809 from where the centre and North of Nigeria was effectively ruled.</p> <p>During this time too, British interest was steadily encroaching in the form of British explorers, anti-slavery activists, missionaries and traders. By 1823 the British government sponsored expedition to Nigeria had covered the south coasts, Bornu, Lake Chad, Kano and through the Hausa territory to Sokoto.</p>

By 1849 or thereabout, it became obvious that the British effort to stop slave trade through increased trade in palm oil was not achieving the desired end. The Nigerian chiefs in the Niger area, rather than divert their business activity from slavery to palm oil, preferred to acquire more slaves to meet the increased demand for palm oil. From then on, the British government accepts a more direct involvement in direct negotiation with the King of Lagos, the main slave shipment port.

In 1851 following a break down in negotiation, the British forces were ordered to attack and capture Lagos. Another member of the Lagos Royal Family who was considered a British loyalist was enthroned. The condition was that he should put an end to the slave trade and human sacrifice. The king and his successor failed to fulfil these terms and by 1861 Lagos was annexed as a British colony.

British trade and political control worked hand in glove. In 1893 the Niger delta region was designated a Niger Coastal Protectorate and pressure was put on the Oba of Benin and his people to end the notorious practices of slave trade and human sacrifice. A British delegation sent to negotiate with the Oba was massacred. In retaliation, the British troops attacked and burned down part of Benin city.

By 1900, Britain had taken responsibility for the control and administration of Nigeria - from the coastal areas (South) to Sokoto and Bornu in the North. In the Berlin conference of 1884, during the scramble for Africa, the entire area of Nigeria today was ceded to Britain as its colony.

AD 1900 - 1960

For ease of administration and uniting the country, the sixty years of colonial rule in Nigeria was characterised by classification and reclassification of regions. The Niger Coastal Protectorate was expanded to become Southern Nigeria, with the seat of government in Lagos. The rulers in the North i.e. the Emir of Kano and the Saduana of Sokoto, resisted direct British rule. To deal with this situation, a military commander, Fredrick Lugard was appointed High Commissioner and commander in chief of the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria. Within three years (1903 – 1906) he subdued Kano and Sokoto and finally put an end to their rulers' slave-raiding expeditions. To pacify the Northern Nigeria, Chiefs who were willing to cooperate with the British were enthroned and given considerable powers, no matter how small their territory in the North.

Following his success in the North, in 1912 Fredrick Lugard was appointed the governor of Northern and Southern Nigeria and charged with the task of merging both regions. In 1914 Lugard successfully merged Northern and Southern regions into what was to become the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria. It is important to add that the citizens of both regions were not consulted in the amalgamation process.

Soon after the second World War, cracks began to appear in the forced union of Northern and Southern Nigeria as various regions began making conflicting demands for autonomy and central government. In 1947, a federal system of government was established under a new Nigerian constitution introduced by the British. This system was based on three regions: Eastern, Western and Northern. The idea was to reconcile the regional and religious tensions as well as accommodating the interest of diverse ethnic groups: mainly the Igbo (in the east), the Yoruba (in the west) and the Hausa and Fulani (in the north).

By 1951, the country had been divided into Eastern, Northern and Western regions, each with its own house of assembly. In the North an additional institution was created to reflect the strong tradition of the tribes – the separate House of Chiefs for the Northern province. There was also an overall legislative council for the whole of Nigeria.

“The federation became self-governing in 1954. Among the key instigators for independence

in the country were Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe and Herbert Macaulay, leaders of the National Council for Nigeria and Cameroons (NCNC), an eastern region dominated party, Obafemi Awolowo (leader of the western based Action Group (AG) party) and Sir Ahmadu Bello and Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa of the conservative Northern Peoples Congress (NPC)” – (iss.co.za).

From 1957 there was a federal prime minister. In that same year, the Eastern and Western regions were granted internal self government, to be followed by the Northern Nigeria in 1959. Specific powers were allocated to the federal government including defence, the police force, the terms of national trade, custom duties, finance and banking. Responsibility for other services in the area of health, agriculture, education and economic development was to be with the Regions.

In October 1st 1960, Nigerian was granted full independence and the tensions between the communities of North and South became the responsibility of Nigeria and its government.

1960 - 1970

Between 1960 and 1966, Nigeria was under civilian rule. Sir Tafawa Balewa was the federal Prime Minister and the Minister for foreign affairs. Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe took over the role of Governor General from the British. In October 1963 Nigeria adopted a revised constitution and Dr. Azikiwe took office as Nigeria’s first President.

Right from the start of independence there was tension between the Northern and Southern Nigeria. One of those sources of tension had to do with political power and control of Nigeria government. By reason of population and political system bequeathed to Nigeria by the British, Northerners controlled not only their regional assembly but also the federal government in Lagos.

Between 1962 and 1964 there was continuous anti-northern unrest in different parts of the Southern region. In February 1964, further threats to the federal unity emerged from the ethnic Tiv tribe of the Benue Plateau- who had sought autonomy since independence. The Nigerian federal army rapidly suppressed the insurgency. “A two-week general strike staged in protest at wage levels the same year also reflected the widespread concern at economic disparities in the Nigerian society and the visible signs of corruption in public life”.

National rivalries and ethnic sentiments reflected in the national armed forces led to a military intervention in January 1966. That rebellion resulted in the assassination of federal prime minister and the premiers of the Northern and Western regions. Regional animosities flared, prompting massacres of Igbo-speakers living in the north. The Supreme Military Council was formed and the constitution suspended. Maj-Gen. Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi, commander-in-chief of the army took control of government on the request of surviving federal ministers. The reins of Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa’s government was officially handed over to General Aguiyi Ironsi by the Senate President and the acting President of the republic, Dr. Abyssinia Nwafor Orizu.

The new and the first Nigerian military government came to an abrupt end following a second coup led by Northern military officers in which General Aguiyi Ironsi, an Igbo, was assassinated. General Yakubu Gowon, a Northern officer, emerged the new Nigerian military head of state.

To deal with the issue of the warring tribes and regions, General Gowon proposed a twelve state structure. Among the benefits of this structure was its capacity to engender larger representation for ethnic groups other than the big three (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba), though not necessarily the end it all for the national issues that have bewitched the country since independence.

On May 30 1967 the military governor of the Eastern Region, Lt. Col. Chukwuemeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu announced the secession of the Eastern Region and proclaimed its independence as the ‘Republic of Biafra’. This proclamation triggered the Nigeria-Biafra civil war which caused estimated military casualties of 1,000,000 (iss.co.za). The new 12 state structure came into effect in April 1968 and a ceasefire agreement between Nigeria and

Biafra was reached in January, 1970. Biafra was reintegrated into the community of Nigerian states.

**CORRUPTION
THE FACELESS
ENEMY**

Since independence in the 1960, Nigeria has battled integrity, transparency and accountability problems within its public service. For example the announced motive behind the 1966 coup led by Major Chuckwuma Nzogwu was a desire to “rid the country of irresponsible politicians, incompetent and corrupt bureaucrats, restore respectability and accountability to the Nigerian public service” (Mbaku, 1998:p48). Years later and by 1983 a third coup masterminded by Brigadier Sani Abacha and his colleagues claimed they were “compelled to seize power from the President Shagari government to save Nigeria from rampant corruption, ineptitude and profligacy that had characterised both the federal and state governments of the country” (Agbese, 1998). By 2009 and over a period of thirty years, the conservative estimate of the cost of integrity, transparency and accountability quagmire in Nigeria was \$300 billion and climbing.

CONCLUSION:

**HAUSA, IGBO AND YORUBA ARE NOT ENEMIES.
LET'S SPEAK THE TRUTH TO EACH OTHER,
RIGHT THE WRONGS AND UNITE OUR COUNTRY.**

It's possible. Just believe!