

Nigeria in the Twentieth Century

Toyin Falola (editor)

Carolina Academic Press (2002)

This book focuses on the major issues in the history of Nigeria during the twentieth century, showing how the country was created and governed under different regimes. While recognizing the role of external influences, notably the establishment of colonial rule by the British, the Cold War, and contemporary global politics, the book stresses the contributions of Nigerians to the development of their country. The leading themes explored in the book are historiography and methods; politics and economy; creativity and literature; and the burdens of the nation-state.

The contributors represent a new crop of Nigerian scholars whose ideas will shape many of the discussions on the country in the next fifty years. Inscribing their aspirations into the analyses and narratives, they see both challenges and optimism as they and their country travel slowly to a future whose conditions are hard to predict.

The importance of Nigeria cannot be exaggerated: one in five Africans is a Nigerian; it is a leading African country with the second largest economy; and it remains a regional power, an influential actor in world politics, and a hugely populated country whose restless citizens will not relent in their demands for progress, political stability, and interethnic harmony.

From the early twentieth century until independence in 1960, the colony of Niger was part of French West Africa. Since the boundaries of the nation-state were imposed by European colonial powers, ethnic and cultural borders do not coincide with state boundaries. Since independence, there have been governmental efforts to promote a national culture. The law of 23 June 1956 gave Niger's politicians more of a voice in the management of their country by establishing a government council presided over by the governor. In addition to removing voting inequalities, these laws provided for the creation of governmental organs, giving individual territories a high degree of self-government. After the establishment of the Fifth French Republic in 1958, Niger became an autonomous state.