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Nigeria: A New History Of A Turbulent Century



Synopsis

Seen from some angles, Nigeria is a remarkable success story: despite its poorly conceived colonial origins, the lingering damage of its colonial subjugation, tenacious civil war, wildly unequal economy, and the recent insurgency by Boko Haram, it has nonetheless remained one nation, growing in population and power, for more than a century now. This new look at Nigeria traces the country's history from its pre-colonial days as the home region to a number of distinct tribal powers through its definition by Britain as a single nation in 1914, to the hopeful early days of independence after World War II and the ongoing, often tragic disappointments of its governance and economic performance in the decades since. Richard Bourne pays particular attention to the failure to ensure that the wealth from Nigeria's abundant oil, mineral, and agricultural resources is widely shared, and he offers an incisive analysis of the damaging effects that such gross inequality has on the nation's stability and democratic prospects. The most up-to-date and comprehensive analysis of Africa's most important and populous nation in decades, this history is rooted in more than three decades of visiting and working in the country and will instantly be the standard account of Nigeria.

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Customer Reviews

"Writing about the diversity and complexity of governance in Nigeria poses a challenge. Richard Bourne has in this book tackled the challenge with detailed research and admirable perspicacity. Recommended reading for all those interested in Nigerian history." (Emeka Anyaoku, former Commonwealth Secretary-General) "This book is a major achievement and I defy anyone who reads it not to learn from it and gain greater understanding of the nature and

development of a major African nation. (Lalage Bown, Glasgow University) "Richard Bourne's meticulously researched book is a major addition to Nigerian history. (Guy Arnold, author of *Africa: A Modern History*)

Richard Bourne is senior research fellow at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, London University, and secretary to the Ramphal Institute in London. He is the author of *Catastrophe: What Went Wrong in Zimbabwe?*

Richard Bourne has made a valuable contribution to the literature about Nigeria, one of the most important countries in Africa. The book is well-researched, covers the scope of time from the creation of the country to the present, and tackles tough questions such as corruption and ethnic/religious concerns. There is a wealth of primary resources and plenty of firsthand observations derived from his long-time connection to the country. One of the key points in the book is how and why Nigeria has managed to remain a unified country - despite considerable pressures to pull it apart. In this, the Biafran War of 1967-70 was a critical moment in the survival of Nigeria. Bourne rightfully contends, "The federal victory in the civil war did not put an end to the existential question about the Nigerian state - whether so many different peoples can live together amicably in one polity. But it recast it. It demonstrated that there are military, political and economic forces strong enough to counteract and defeat centrifugal and fissiparous tendencies." Moreover, "And above all it showed that the minority tribes all over the country were committed to the survival of a recognized federation, in which their voices could be heard and that the Nigerian Army would not allow the Nigerian experiment to fail." Bourne also does much to breathe life into the major personalities who have walked across the Nigerian historical stage. This includes the likes of Frederick Lugard (often seen as one of the founders of modern Nigeria under the British), Sani Abacha ("may not have excelled in warfare, but he was extremely skilled at conspiracy."), Ibrahim Babangida, Olusegun Obasanjo, and Goodluck Jonathan. The last served as president when the elected leader unexpectedly in office and he was thrust into the country's top spot in 2010, when Umaru Musa Yar'Adua died. Often described as "meek" and unassuming, Bourne notes that he was steeled by "a determination to win the 2011 presidential election", and was strengthened by his wife, Patience, "a tough lady". Jonathan was able to win the 2011 election, but his time in office hardly stellar, with his administration seemingly adrift on many policy fronts, in particular the rise of the northern Islamic radical movement, Boko Haram. Boko Haram rose in the late 2000s and came out of longstanding grievances in a lesser developed north, that was predominantly Muslim in terms of

religion. Bourne makes the point that Islam in Nigeria is not entirely defined by the north. He notes, "What is clear is that the eastward-looking and Sahara-facing Islam of the north, with its recurring and militant fundamentalisms most recently appearing in the form of Boko Haram, is different from the Islam of Lagos. In Lagos it is common for families to contain both Christians and Muslims, living together without friction and converting in both directions". Bourne notes in contrast, that "the situation in northern Nigeria is often tense, especially in religiously mixed towns, with fights, church and mosque burnings, and murders." The root causes are to be found in a very different historical experience that left the Christian south better educated and with the advantage of oil, leaving the north with larger families, lower levels of education and high levels of unemployment. The combination of these forces "have led to jealousy and a reservoir of resentful youths who hold an anti-modernity worldview." Bourne expects this problem to continue. Nigeria often comes off as a paradox; a country blessed with a wide range of natural resources (oil in particular), yet still with a large share of its people mired in poverty. At the same time, it is constantly challenged by forces that would pull it apart. Bourne ends his book with the 2015 election of Muhammadu Buhari, a northern Muslim and former military man, as president. The achievement was that for the first time in the country's history, an incumbent president was not given a second term and the opposition leader assumed the chief executive position. Bourne ends his book with the following: "With so many problems to be solved, it was unrealistic to suppose that a change of government alone would have magical results. What Nigerians had shown, however, was impressive resilience, with more confidence in the future of themselves and their state." I strongly recommend Bourne's history of Nigeria, especially for new students of the country. It is a good read and does much to explain what is a pivotal, yet complicated country.

Comprehensive and relevant for a rapidly changing nation. Many of Nigeria's struggles today like North-South polarization and both economic and security struggles become even clearer as you read this superb account of the country's past. With this book, you can understand more clearly the options for Nigeria's future and the likelihood of where the country is headed.

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