



The Nigeria Area 1800 – 1900: A History Guide

SECTION B: THE NIGERIA AREA 1800 – 1900

This section explores a pivotal century in the history of the Nigerian area, marked by significant internal transformations (like the Sokoto Jihad and the Yoruba Wars) and the intensifying impact of European presence, leading up to the British conquest.

Internal Transformations and Regional Dynamics

This term focuses on major internal developments within the various polities of the Nigeria area during the 19th century.

1. The Sokoto Caliphate

The Sokoto Caliphate was a powerful Islamic empire established in Northern Nigeria during the 19th century, profoundly influencing the region's political, social, and religious landscape.

- **The Sokoto Jihad (1804-1810s):**
 - **Causes:**
 - **Religious Degradation:** Uthman Dan Fodio and his followers perceived a decline in true Islamic practices (syncretism, mixing Islam with traditional beliefs) in the Hausa states.
 - **Political Injustice:** Hausa rulers were seen as oppressive, corrupt, and unjust, imposing arbitrary taxes and violating Islamic laws.
 - **Social Injustice:** Exploitation of the poor (talakawa), discrimination against Muslims, and enslavement of freeborn Muslims.
 - **Economic Grievances:** High and illegal taxation by Hausa rulers.
 - **Desire for Political Power:** Dan Fodio and his followers sought to establish a more just and pure Islamic state.
 - **Leadership of Uthman Dan Fodio:** His charisma, scholarship, and commitment to Islamic reform galvanized support.
 - **Course (The Process of the Jihad):**
 - **Hijra (Migration):** In 1804, Uthman Dan Fodio and his community migrated from Gobir to Gudu, similar to Prophet Muhammad's Hijra.
 - **Declaration of Jihad:** Following persecution by the Gobir ruler, Yunfa, Dan Fodio declared a jihad (holy war).
 - **Flag Bearers:** Dan Fodio distributed flags to his trusted lieutenants, authorizing them to lead the jihad in various Hausa states and beyond.

- **Military Campaigns:** A series of successful military campaigns led by Dan Fodio and his flag bearers conquered the existing Hausa states and other non-Muslim territories.
 - **Establishment of Emirates:** Conquered territories were reorganized into Emirates, each ruled by an Emir, loyal to the Caliphate.
 - **Consequences:**
 - **Establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate:** A vast, centralized Islamic empire emerged, spanning much of Northern Nigeria and parts of Cameroon, Niger, and Burkina Faso.
 - **Spread of Islam:** Accelerated the spread and purification of Islam throughout the region.
 - **Unification of Northern Nigeria:** Brought a semblance of political and religious unity to diverse communities.
 - **Slavery:** Increased the scale of slavery, as non-Muslims in conquered territories were often enslaved.
 - **Destruction of Old Hausa Monarchies:** Overthrew the traditional Hausa ruling class.
 - **Economic Changes:** Introduced a more centralized taxation system, fostered trade within the Caliphate, and promoted Islamic education.
 - **Rise of the Fulani:** The Fulani, who were prominent among Dan Fodio's followers, became the new ruling elite in many Emirates.
- **The Establishment and Administration of the Caliphate:**
 - **Centralized Authority:** The Caliph (Sultan of Sokoto), Uthman Dan Fodio, and later his son Muhammad Bello, was the supreme spiritual and political head.
 - **Emirates:** The Caliphate was divided into semi-autonomous Emirates, each ruled by an Emir appointed by and loyal to the Sultan.
 - **Administrative Structure:** Emirs were assisted by a council of advisors (Waziri, Galadima, Madawaki, etc.), district heads, and village heads.
 - **Judicial System:** Based on Islamic Sharia law, administered by Alkalis (judges).
 - **Taxation:** A standardized system of Islamic taxes (Zakat, Jizya, Kharaj) was implemented.
 - **Military:** A well-organized cavalry and infantry maintained order and defended the Caliphate.
- **Achievements and Impact of the Caliphate:**
 - **Political Unity:** Created one of the largest and most influential empires in Africa in the 19th century.
 - **Religious Revival:** Deepened Islamic learning and practice.
 - **Administrative Efficiency:** Introduced a relatively stable and efficient administrative system.
 - **Economic Prosperity:** Fostered internal trade and agricultural development.
 - **Educational Advancement:** Established numerous Islamic schools and centers of learning, producing influential scholars.
- **The Collapse of the Caliphate:**
 - **Internal Dissensions:** Growing rivalries among Emirs, succession disputes, and weakening central control from Sokoto.
 - **Administrative Problems:** Corruption, oppressive taxation, and injustice became prevalent in some Emirates, leading to revolts.

- **Rise of Rabih Fadlallah:** His invasion from the East significantly weakened the Borno sector of the Caliphate.
- **British Conquest:** The ultimate cause of collapse was the superior military might and administrative efficiency of the British colonial forces during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, who systematically conquered the Emirates.

2. Kanem-Borno

The Kanem-Borno Empire, an ancient power in the Chad Basin, also experienced significant changes in the 19th century.

- **The Collapse of the Saifawa Dynasty:**
 - The long-ruling Saifawa dynasty, which had governed Borno for over a thousand years, faced internal decline, weak leadership, and external pressures in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.
 - The Sokoto Jihad also impacted Borno, as some local groups aligned with the jihadists, threatening the Saifawa's authority.
- **Borno Under Shehu El-Kanemi (and his successors):**
 - In response to the jihadist threat, a renowned Islamic scholar and military leader, Muhammad al-Amin al-Kanemi, emerged. He successfully repelled the jihadists, saved Borno, and effectively took over real power from the weakened Saifawa dynasty, though he initially maintained the Mai (Saifawa ruler) as a figurehead.
 - His family, the Al-Kanemi dynasty, eventually replaced the Saifawa and established a new, strong, and centralized rule in Borno. They revitalized the state, strengthened its military, and re-established its position in Trans-Saharan trade.
- **Borno Under Rabih Fadlallah:**
 - In the late 19th century, Borno faced a devastating invasion by Rabih Fadlallah, a Sudanese warlord. Rabih conquered Borno in 1893, overthrowing the Al-Kanemi dynasty and establishing a brutal and short-lived rule.
 - His rule marked a period of immense destruction and disruption for Borno. His defeat by the French in 1900 paved the way for British control over parts of Borno.

3. Yorubaland

The 19th century was a period of intense warfare and political upheaval in Yorubaland.

- **The Fall of the Old Oyo Empire (c. 1830s):**
 - **Causes:**
 - **Internal Decay:** Weak Obas, political intrigues, power struggles between the Oba and the Oyo Mesi (council of chiefs).
 - **Succession Disputes:** Frequent and violent struggles for the throne.
 - **Abdication of Alafin Aole:** His enforced suicide by the Oyo Mesi (following a curse by Afonja of Ilorin) undermined the Oba's ritual authority.
 - **Rise of Provincial Chiefs:** Governors of distant provinces (e.g., Afonja of Ilorin) became increasingly independent, rebelling against Oyo.
 - **Fulani Jihad:** The Fulani jihadists from the North took advantage of Oyo's weakness, supporting Afonja and eventually conquering Ilorin, making it an Emirate and raiding further south.
 - **Decline of Cavalry:** Oyo's traditional military strength (cavalry) was less effective in the southern forest regions and against new threats.

- **Slave Trade:** The external demand for slaves contributed to internal conflicts and instability.
 - **Consequences:** The collapse of the vast Oyo Empire led to a power vacuum and prolonged civil wars.
- **The Yoruba Wars (c. 1820s-1893):**
 - A series of inter-state wars that lasted for decades, involving various Yoruba subgroups (e.g., Ibadan, Ijaye, Egba, Ijebu, Ijesha, Ekiti).
 - **Causes:** Power vacuum after Oyo's fall, competition for trade routes (especially to the coast), control over resources, desire for supremacy, slave raiding.
 - **Key Battles/Events:** Battles like the Ikirun War, the Kiriji War (the longest civil war in Yoruba history), and the siege of different towns.
 - **Impact:** Massive destruction, displacement of populations, emergence of new powerful military states (e.g., Ibadan as a new military power), creation of refugee towns (e.g., Abeokuta), and the proliferation of slavery. It severely weakened Yorubaland, making it vulnerable to European intervention.
- **The Peace Treaty of 1886 and its Aftermath:**
 - British intervention, initially as mediators, intensified due to their desire to end the wars (which disrupted trade) and establish control.
 - A peace treaty was signed in 1886, officially ending the Kiriji War. However, intermittent conflicts continued, and the British began to establish consulates and exert influence.
 - **Aftermath:** The treaties and British "mediation" gradually paved the way for British colonial annexation of Yorubaland in the late 19th century, taking advantage of the exhaustion and fragmentation caused by the wars.

4. Benin

The Benin Kingdom, a powerful and ancient polity, maintained its independence and influence during the early 19th century, albeit facing increasing external pressures.

- **Internal Political Development:**
 - The Oba of Benin remained the supreme spiritual and political leader, ruling with the aid of powerful chiefs (e.g., Uzama Nihinron, Egharevbas).
 - The kingdom maintained a highly centralized administrative structure.
 - However, the influence of chiefs and internal factions sometimes challenged the Oba's authority.
- **Relations with Neighbors:**
 - Benin maintained influence over some neighboring territories (e.g., parts of Igboland, Edo-speaking groups).
 - It engaged in trade and sometimes conflict with other polities like the Oyo Empire and coastal city-states.
- **Relations with the Europeans:**
 - Benin had a long history of contact with Europeans (dating back to the Portuguese in the 15th century), primarily through trade.
 - In the 19th century, this trade intensified, with European demand for palm oil and other raw materials growing, and also still involved the slave trade until its suppression.
 - The British, in particular, became increasingly interested in controlling Benin's rich resources and its strategic location, leading to tensions, eventual conquest in 1897.

5. Nupe

The Nupe kingdom, located in the Niger-Benue confluence, also experienced significant changes, partly influenced by the Sokoto Jihad.

- **Internal Political Development:**
 - The 19th century saw internal conflicts and succession disputes within the Nupe ruling dynasty.
 - This internal strife made them vulnerable to external influence.
 - The kingdom eventually came under the influence of the Sokoto Caliphate, with the emergence of a new Fulani dynasty, making it an Emirate.
- **Relations with Neighbors:**
 - Maintained trade relations with Hausa states, Yorubaland, and the Igala kingdom.
 - Often engaged in warfare with neighbors for control of trade routes and territory.

6. Igbo

The Igbo society remained largely acephalous (stateless) in the 19th century, with power diffused among various institutions.

- **Internal Political Development:**
 - Still characterized by decentralized village-republics, age-grades, secret societies, and title associations (e.g., Ozo).
 - Decision-making remained highly democratic, based on consensus in village assemblies.
 - The Aro Confederacy, a powerful trading network centered on the Arochukwu oracle, wielded significant influence over a wide area through trade and spiritual authority.
- **Relations with Neighbors:**
 - Engaged in extensive internal and regional trade with neighbors like the Igala, Ijaw, and Edo.
 - The Aro Confederacy's influence extended through trade and the oracle.
 - Sometimes involved in local conflicts over land or resources.

7. Efik

The Efik people, primarily concentrated in the Calabar region, built powerful trading city-states.

- **Internal Political Development:**
 - The Efik city-states (e.g., Old Calabar) were ruled by influential merchant princes and the powerful Ekpe (Leopard) Secret Society.
 - The Ekpe society played crucial political, judicial, and economic roles, enforcing trade regulations, maintaining order, and collecting debts.
 - Their political structure was highly focused on trade and wealth.
- **Relations with Neighbors:**
 - Acted as middlemen in the trade between European merchants on the coast and the hinterland communities (e.g., Igbo, Ibibio).
 - Maintained trade relations with other coastal communities and interior groups.