Nigeria 1900 – 1960: A History Guide

SECTION C: NIGERIA 1900 – 1960
This section covers the establishment and consolidation of British colonial rule in Nigeria, the administrative structures put in place, the economic and social changes brought by colonialism, the rise of nationalism, and the constitutional journey towards independence.

Consolidation of Colonial Rule and Its Impact

This term focuses on the early years of colonial administration, the pivotal Amalgamation of 1914, and the fundamental changes brought to Nigeria's economy and society under British rule.

1. Establishment of Colonial Rule up to 1914

By the turn of the 20th century, Britain had secured its claims over the territories that would become Nigeria, following the "Scramble for Africa."

- **Administration of the Protectorates:**
    - By 1900, the British government took over administration from the Royal Niger Company (RNC) and consolidated its holdings into three distinct administrative units:
        - **Colony and Protectorate of Lagos:** Directly administered by a Governor.
        - **Southern Nigeria Protectorate:** Formed from the Niger Coast Protectorate (formerly Oil Rivers Protectorate). Administered by a High Commissioner.
        - **Northern Nigeria Protectorate:** Administered by a High Commissioner, most famously Lord Lugard.
    - Each protectorate had its own administration, laws, and budget, though all ultimately answered to the Colonial Office in London. This initial fragmentation reflected the piecemeal nature of British acquisition.
- **The Amalgamation of 1914:**
    - **Reasons:**
        - **Administrative Convenience:** To unify the disparate administrations of Northern and Southern Nigeria into a single, more manageable entity.
        - **Economic Viability:** The Northern Protectorate was largely unprofitable and dependent on grants from the British Treasury. Amalgamating it with the more economically buoyant Southern Protectorate (especially Lagos and the Niger Delta, rich in palm produce) would create a financially self-sufficient colony.

        - **Resource Management:** To facilitate the efficient exploitation of Nigeria's resources under one central authority.
        - **Political Stability:** To reduce administrative duplication and create a more unified political structure.
        - **Lord Lugard's Vision:** Lugard, who had previously governed Northern Nigeria, was a strong proponent of amalgamation, believing it was essential for efficient administration and development.
    - **Effects:**
        - **Creation of Modern Nigeria:** Formally brought diverse ethnic groups and geographical zones under a single colonial administration, laying the foundation for the modern Nigerian state.
        - **Centralized Administration:** A single Governor-General (Lord Lugard) was appointed to oversee the entire amalgamated territory.
        - **Preservation of Regional Differences:** Despite amalgamation, Lugard maintained distinct administrative structures for the Northern and Southern Provinces (later Southern Provinces were split into Eastern and Western Provinces), largely due to the success of Indirect Rule in the North and the different political structures in the South. This perpetuated regionalism.
        - **No Legislative Unity:** The Legislative Council in Lagos initially only legislated for the Colony of Lagos and parts of the Southern Protectorate, excluding the Northern Protectorate until 1922.
        - **Foundation for Future Conflicts:** The forced union of diverse groups with different cultures, religions, and administrative experiences, without proper consultation, sowed seeds of distrust and regional competition that would later plague independent Nigeria.

2. Colonial Administration After the Amalgamation

After 1914, the British refined their administrative approach to govern the vast new colony.

- **Central Administration – Legislative and Executive Councils:**
    - **Structure:**
        - **Governor-General (later Governor):** The supreme authority in the colony, responsible to the Colonial Office in London.
        - **Nigerian Council (1914-1922):** Established by Lugard, it was an advisory body for the whole of Nigeria, but with no legislative powers. Its members were mostly Europeans, with a few nominated Africans, but it rarely met and was ineffective.
        - **Legislative Council (1922-1946):** Created by the Clifford Constitution, it legislated for the Colony of Lagos and the Southern Protectorate. It introduced the elective principle, allowing for limited African representation. The North remained excluded from its legislative purview.
        - **Executive Council:** Composed of colonial officials, it advised the Governor-General/Governor and held true executive power. Africans were largely excluded from this council until much later.
    - **Functions, Working, and Effects:**
        - These councils were instruments of colonial rule, designed to facilitate administration and resource exploitation.

        - African representation, when introduced, was limited and largely advisory, giving Nigerians little real power.
        - They served as training grounds for a nascent Nigerian political elite to understand Western parliamentary procedures, though their powers were severely circumscribed.
        - The exclusion of the North from the Legislative Council until 1946 further entrenched regional administrative differences.
- **Native Administrative Institutions, Native Authorities, Native Courts and Native Police:**
    - **Indirect Rule:** The primary British administrative policy, especially in Northern Nigeria, was Indirect Rule.
        - **Native Authorities (NAs):** The backbone of Indirect Rule. These were traditional political structures (e.g., Emir in the North, Oba in the West) through which the British administered the colony. Where strong traditional systems existed, they were largely preserved. Where they were absent (e.g., parts of Igbo land), the British created "Warrant Chiefs" to serve as NAs.
        - **Functions of NAs:** Collection of taxes, maintenance of law and order, execution of minor public works, and administration of native courts.
    - **Native Courts:** Operated alongside the British-style courts, administering customary law and Islamic law (Sharia) in respective areas, but often subject to review by British officials. They handled local disputes.
    - **Native Police:** Local forces under the Native Authorities, responsible for enforcing local laws and maintaining order.
    - **Effects:**
        - **Preservation of Traditional Rulers (in some areas):** Maintained the facade of traditional authority, making colonial rule cheaper and seemingly less disruptive.
        - **Entrenched Regional Differences:** The varied success of Indirect Rule led to different administrative experiences in the North, West, and East.
        - **Weakening of Traditional Authority:** While used, traditional rulers became agents of the colonial state, losing some of their original legitimacy and accountability to their people.
        - **Emergence of Warrant Chiefs:** In the East, the imposition of Warrant Chiefs, who lacked traditional legitimacy, led to widespread resentment and protests (e.g., Aba Women's Riot).
        - **Limited Development:** Resources collected by NAs were often not adequately reinvested in the development of local communities, and the system often stifled modern political participation.
- **Resistance to Colonial Rule (Specific Examples):**
    - Despite the consolidated British rule, resistance continued in various forms throughout the early 20th century.
    - **Ekwumeku Movement (Igbo Land, 1900-1911):** A series of armed revolts by various Igbo communities against British invasion, the imposition of Warrant Chiefs, and attempts to suppress the Aro Confederacy. The British responded with punitive expeditions.
    - **Satiru Uprising (Northern Nigeria, 1906):** A religiously motivated uprising led by Mallam Musa in Satiru (Sokoto Caliphate) against British rule and the Sokoto Sultan who was seen as collaborating with the British. It was brutally suppressed.

- **Egba and Aro Expedition (1901-1902):** The British launched a major military expedition against the Aro Confederacy, aiming to destroy its power base (especially the Arochukwu oracle) and open up the Igbo hinterland for trade and administration. The Aro were defeated, and their influence broken.
- **Aba Women's Movement (1929):** (Also known as the Aba Women's Riot) A massive protest by women in southeastern Nigeria (primarily Igbo, Ibibio, and Opobo women) against oppressive British taxation policies (especially proposed taxation of women), the Warrant Chief system, and the erosion of women's traditional roles. It was a significant uprising that forced the British to review their Indirect Rule policies in the East.
- **Forms of Resistance:** While direct military confrontation became less frequent after the initial conquest, resistance manifested through tax evasion, non-cooperation, cultural preservation, and the emergence of early nationalist sentiments.

3. Colonial Economy

The British fundamentally re-shaped Nigeria's economy to serve the interests of the colonial power.

- **Currency, Taxation and Forced Labour:**
  - **Currency:** Traditional currencies (e.g., cowries, manillas) were gradually replaced by British currency (pounds, shillings, pence), integrating Nigeria into the global monetary system.
  - **Taxation:** Various taxes were introduced (e.g., poll tax, hut tax, income tax) to generate revenue for the colonial administration and to force Nigerians into the cash economy (often by working for wages in colonial enterprises).
  - **Forced Labour:** Nigerians were often compelled to provide free labor for colonial projects like road and railway construction, porterage, and other public works. This was a major source of grievance.
- **External Trade (Export/Import, Post and Telecommunication):**
  - **Export-Oriented Economy:** Nigeria became a primary producer of raw materials for British industries. Major exports included palm oil, palm kernels, cocoa, groundnuts, cotton, hides and skins, and later tin and coal.
  - **Import of Manufactured Goods:** In return, Nigeria imported finished goods from Britain (textiles, machinery, processed foods), leading to the decline of local industries.
  - **Post and Telecommunication:** Essential infrastructure (postal services, telegraphs, later telephones) was developed to facilitate colonial administration, trade, and communication with Britain.
- **Agriculture:**
  - Remained the dominant economic activity.
  - Emphasis shifted from subsistence farming to cash crop production for export. Cocoa (West), Groundnuts (North), Palm oil/kernels (East and South) became major cash crops.
  - Colonial policies encouraged large-scale production, often at the expense of food security.

- **Mining:**
  - Significant mining activities, especially for **tin** (Jos Plateau) and **coal** (Enugu), developed rapidly. These resources were primarily extracted to fuel British industries.
  - These activities often involved harsh labor conditions for Nigerians.
- **Industry:**
  - Very limited industrial development under colonial rule. British policy generally discouraged local industrialization to protect British manufacturers and maintain Nigeria as a market for finished goods.
  - Most "industries" were primary processing (e.g., palm oil mills) or small-scale crafts.
- **Commerce:**
  - Dominated by European trading firms (e.g., UAC, John Holt).
  - African middlemen (like the traditional coastal traders) gradually lost their prominence as European firms established direct control over trade networks.
  - Indigenous commerce was largely relegated to local distribution.
- **Banking:**
  - The introduction of Western-style banking (e.g., British Bank of West Africa, Barclays Bank) facilitated trade, investment, and the collection of taxes. These banks primarily served European businesses and colonial administration, with limited access for Africans.

4. Social Development under Colonial Rule

Colonial rule brought significant social changes, often with mixed outcomes.

- **Western Education:**
  - Introduced primarily by Christian missionaries, later supported by the colonial government.
  - **Purpose:** To train clerks, interpreters, and catechists for colonial administration and missions.
  - **Impact:**
    - **Emergence of an Educated Elite:** Created a new class of educated Africans who would later lead nationalist movements.
    - **Increased Literacy:** Though limited, it exposed Nigerians to new ideas, including concepts of liberty and self-determination.
    - **Social Stratification:** Created a divide between the educated elite and the traditional/uneducated masses.
    - **Regional Imbalance:** Education spread more rapidly in the South than in the North, contributing to socio-political disparities.
- **Urbanization/Social Integration:**
  - Growth of administrative and commercial centers (e.g., Lagos, Enugu, Kaduna, Ibadan, Kano) attracted people from rural areas, leading to increased urbanization.
  - This led to a new form of social integration, as people from different ethnic groups mixed in urban centers, but also created new social problems (e.g., overcrowding, crime, ethnic tensions).
  - New social classes emerged: Western-educated elites, urban workers, traders.
- **Religious Institutions:**
  - **Christianity:** Continued to spread rapidly, particularly in Southern Nigeria, through missionary activities and schools. This challenged traditional African religions.

    - **Islam:** Remained dominant in the North and continued to spread in the West, often solidifying its presence through Islamic schools and practices.
    - **Impact:** Contributed to religious diversity, but also led to inter-religious tensions and cultural clashes.
- **Health Institutions:**
    - Colonial administration introduced Western medicine and established hospitals, dispensaries, and public health campaigns (e.g., against malaria, smallpox).
    - **Purpose:** Primarily to cater to European officials, but also extended to some Africans.
    - **Impact:** Improved public health in some areas, reduced incidence of certain diseases, but access to healthcare remained largely limited for the majority of the population.