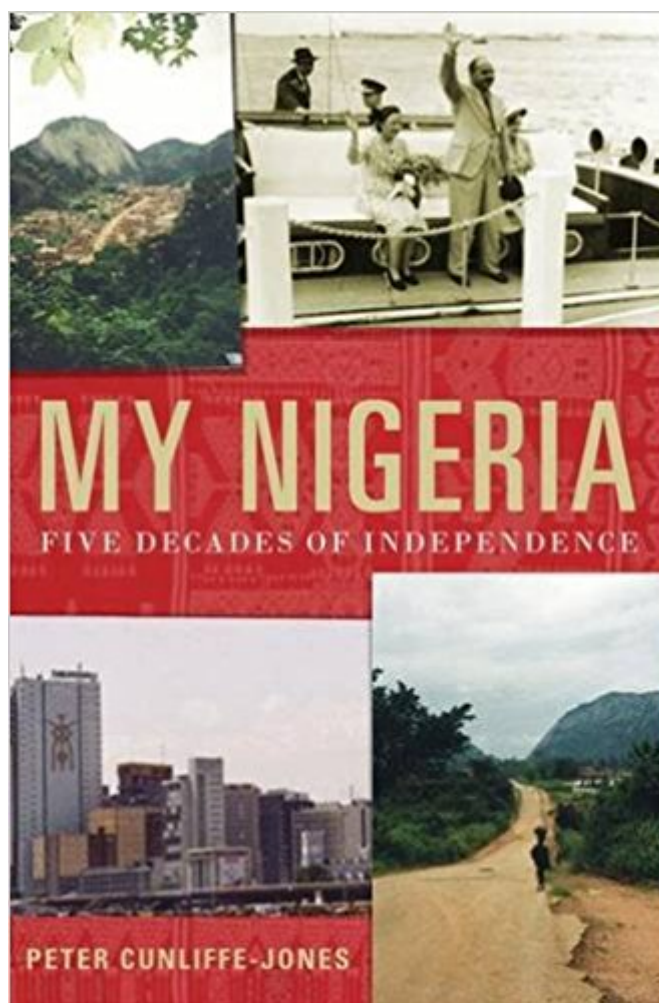


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My Nigeria: Five Decades Of Independence



Synopsis

His nineteenth-century cousin, paddled ashore by slaves, twisted the arms of tribal chiefs to sign away their territorial rights in the oil-rich Niger Delta. Sixty years later, his grandfather helped craft Nigeria's constitution and negotiate its independence, the first of its kind in Africa. Four decades later, Peter Cunliffe-Jones arrived as a journalist in the capital, Lagos, just as military rule ended, to face the country his family had a hand in shaping. Part family memoir, part history, *My Nigeria* is a piercing look at the colonial legacy of an emerging power in Africa. Marshalling his deep knowledge of the nation's economic, political, and historic forces, Cunliffe-Jones surveys its colonial past and explains why British rule led to collapse at independence. He also takes an unflinching look at the complicated country today, from email hoaxes and political corruption to the vast natural resources that make it one of the most powerful African nations; from life in Lagos's virtually unknown and exclusive neighborhoods to the violent conflicts between the numerous tribes that make up this populous African nation. As Nigeria celebrates five decades of independence, this is a timely and personal look at a captivating country that has yet to achieve its great potential.

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Customer Reviews

“Mr. Cunliffe -Jones has produced a sweeping yet intimate portrait of his and his distinguished family's sojourn in Africa's most populous and complicated nation Nigeria. It is a work that deserves widespread critical attention. A triumph!”
Chinua Achebe
“Peter Cunliffe-Jones paints a vivid portrait of Nigeria's hydra-headed travails in this passionate, intensely personal book—a vivid portrait [and the author has] a delightful knack

for illustrating his points with anecdotes and stories that are at once wrenching and comic. —• —•
—• —• The Washington Post —• —• “Offers some challenging thinking about the nature of a country for which Cunliffe-Jones clearly feels great affection...Pleasingly he quotes Nigerians rather than foreign experts, and tackles religious tensions, oil wealth and woes, and the everyday problems of corruption...Cunliffe-Jones marshals his impressive knowledge of the country to seek out reasons for hope. —• —• —• —• Times Literary Supplement —• —• “High hope and crushing disappointment runs through *My Nigeria*, a chronicle of Africa’s most populous country from the moment of its independence from Britain in 1960 to its troubles today. —• —• —• —• The Wall Street Journal —• —• “Many thought provoking scenes —• —• | an important book. —• —• —• —• The Guardian Nigeria —• —• “Peter Cunliffe-Jones, a veteran journalist, follows in the footsteps of his forefathers—a colonizer and an administrator—and serves up a must read for anybody looking to understand Africa’s most dynamic country. In this empathetic, keenly-observed, multigenerational memoir, Cunliffe-Jones expertly lays out the challenges facing Nigeria as it approaches 50 years of independence and finds itself once again on the brink. —• —• —• —• Stephan Faris, author of *Forecast* —• —• “An amazing book, it captures the essence of Nigeria brilliantly. It is the best work I have read on Nigeria. —• —• —• —• Adunola Abiola, daughter of the late M.K.O. Abiola. —• —• “Nigeria is a big subject, but Cunliffe-Jones cuts it down to size. Enriched by his own experience and his family’s own role in the country’s past, this vivid book is more than a history. It is like stumbling upon a time capsule. —• —• —• —• Robert Calderisi, author of *The Trouble with Africa: Why Foreign Aid Isn’t Working* —• —• “A very readable history of Nigeria, a personal memoir and a family history all in one book. Peter Cunliffe-Jones has produced a warm and enlightening introduction to this huge, dynamic and fascinating country and its damaged past. Intriguing and sometimes shocking it explains why Nigeria today is the frustrated giant of Africa. —• —• —• —• Richard Dowden, author of *Africa: Altered States, Ordinary Miracles* —• —• “This is an excellent, readable book both for those who think they know Nigeria and those who are just curious about the country. —• —• —• —• Father Matthew Kukah, Leading Nigerian commentator —• —• “As Nigeria celebrates 50 years of independence this book aids the understanding of both the colonial legacy and the challenges facing the country. Written in a personal manner by a veteran journalist whose family have been deeply involved in Nigeria’s history, this very readable account is a worthy addition to the corpus of post-colonial history books, and should be of interest to both historians and the general public. —• —• —• —• Dr. Maggie Canvin, Sociolingo.com

Peter Cunliffe-Jones has been a foreign correspondent for over 20 years for The Economist, The Independent and the Paris-based Agence France Presse news agency where he is now a senior editor. Since 1990 he has reported from western Europe, the Balkans, West Africa, and East Asia. He is today the agency's head of English-language multimedia news. From 1998 to 2003 he was AFP bureau chief in Lagos, Nigeria. He lives in London.

A must read!

A short, well written history of Nigeria. A nice blend of the big picture and the author's personal relationship with the country. Well worth a read.

Very readable account. This sympathetic book, *My Nigeria: Five Decades of Independence* is in sharp contrast in tone from the more-or-less equally revealing but ominous book on the Nigerian condition by Karl Maier a few years ago. The delivery of *My Nigeria* is a compassionate one from a competent literary hand. Where Maier's otherwise well-written work is judgmental in his title and theme with a uniformly tragic tone apparently deduced from the din of the hectically paced nation before him, Peter Cunliffe-Jones's *My Nigeria* makes a correspondingly mordant case about the country, but on balance in a sympathetic but firm and insightful way. The author, a journalist with the news agency, Agence France Presse seems to adroitly weave two strands of narrative into the supple tapestry that is the Nigeria social fabric. This he does in crisp and yet flowery cadences that make the book hard to put down. His apparent first goal seems an innately personal journey, to give something back to the country, and the continent, that lost so much from the encounter with their erstwhile colonizing masters - a pillage in which he deftly shows his forebears as foot-soldiers to different degree. The second strand in the account is the downright journalistic grunt of his sheer hard work to document, report and graphically reveal the state of the previously promising fledgling nation (reflected in his own affectionate title: *My Nigeria*), and to narrate the cesspool corruption and incompetence have conspired to make it today. His journalist pedigree is evident in his handle of the history of the peoples. The scope covers the timeline of the region from its ancient primitive pre-dawn of recorded history, through the coalescing of the wandering hunter-gatherers into various nation-building polities, to the advent of Europeans and the attendant rupture in the cultural fabric and the natural political evolution of the various peoples - an existential process that eventually saw the British empire presiding over the upshot, with its amalgamation of remarkably contrasting peoples into one fledgling nation-state, which it, in short order handed over to unprepared hands

with no prior try of the democratic process they are to go by. As the saying goes, the rest is history: the unfolding of which Cunliffe-Jones has deployed the power of his journalistic pen on the fluid and thrilling pages of the book, showing the dynamics that shapes the intractable problems that has dogged the country from its official inception 50 years ago: tribal identity, crude oil, incompetence and corruption, and a citizenry passive to the incompetence of its leaders. Giving the account a unique perspective is no doubt the author's access to privileged information as much as the grunt of his journalist prowess in research. From the insight of the diaries of his grandfather, Hugo Marshall, who was the first lieutenant-governor of the most important region at the dawn of the country, we are treated with revealing private thoughts of this stalwart of colonial power of the time. We also glean a perspective afforded by ties to an earlier forebear, Edward Burns, an actual foot-soldier in the gun-to-the head vigilante campaign that bequeathed title and authority of African lands in the "treaties" so obtained to one of the European powers. Hence, we are treated with a graphic view of the drama of the hectic, uneasy grafting of the south and north territories of the Niger area, despite their rather markedly disparate cultures and traditions that had hitherto evolved distinctly. With not much time for subsequent nation-building before historical factors forced the hands of the British empire to fledge its new progeny to be on its own. A gripping read indeed. The realism of the prose is enlivened with numerous informal and formal interviews of ordinary folks as well as powerful ones. Particularly riveting is how he deftly illustrates the opportunism of many ersatz Nigerian leaders, the various kick-back nouveau-riche governors and the crude-oil millionaires who are actual unlikely players in various self-enrichment schemes at the expense of the electorates. In all, rather than kill his subject with kindness though, or to come to rash conclusion about the state of the nascent nation, he deftly balances the account by graphically delivering the story with a show-but-not-tell method, making the problems and their origin manifest for the reader discernment. The inadequacy of the leadership as well as the passivity of the citizenry is made more palpable when stood in comparison to Indonesia, a country with which Nigeria share the same multicultural diversity, colonial experience and squalor 50 years ago. While the former has since made good on various measures, the latter shrivels in an alarming way. Some indictment. However, on the apparent original motivation for some kind of self-atonement or palliative restitution by a benevolent descendant of those pivotal men in the history visited upon Africa, the author deserves our compliment, above all for his steadfastness in putting the book together in spite of near-death experiences in the process, from armed robbers, malaria fever among other social pathologies of Nigeria. The handy bibliography at the end of the book, should be informative to many Nigerians about what they otherwise do not know about their own national history, so much so that some may

hopefully find in it a springboard for embarking on more serious and dispassionate study about how the country got this way. The quaint and helpful photos included are worthy -- in some cases, more than the many words in the book they aptly compliment, in shedding the light on the colonial ambiance of the era. Although, it would have been more helpful for the author to throw in a map or two, to help those not familiar with that part of the world have a better grasp. As for the atonement thing, it is doubtful if the magnanimity of his journalist friend who casually brushed off the author's reasoned inherited remorse (by unilaterally declaring the responsibility being squarely Nigerians' now) really means much. The contrast in their perspectives on this third arrival itself perhaps mirrors their epistemologies on the gravity of history. And perhaps the overall judgment for the work of this traveler of conscience is best left to posterity and to the author's conscience.

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