

Nigeria and World War II

Britain's declaration of war on Germany on September 3, 1939, made Nigeria, like many other African societies, an active participant in the war against the Axis Powers. Leading to large-scale mobilization of human and material resources, it transformed lives and societies in irrevocable ways. Of the 90,000 West African soldiers deployed to Southeast Asia after 1943, more than half came from Nigeria.

In this important, revisionist history, Chima J. Korieh examines how the lives of Nigerian producers, workers, merchants, men, women, and children from across society were affected. Korieh recounts the extraordinary and often neglected story of the Nigerian people who were drawn into a global war, the enormous demands it made on their resources, and the way it would change both their lives and the societies in which they lived. By placing the role that African societies played in the war within the contextual and theoretical frameworks of colonialism, race, gender, identity, labor, intellectual, and social history, Korieh challenges the dominant perception that World War II was primarily a European conflict and reveals the global impact of ordinary Nigerians on the war effort.

Chima J. Korieh is a professor of history and the director of Africana Studies at Marquette University, Milwaukee, where his research focuses on West African economic and social history in the colonial period. He is the author of *“Life Not Worth Living”: Nigerian Petitions Reflecting an African Society’s Experiences during World War II* (2014). He was formerly a British Academy Fellow at the University of Oxford.

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Colonialism, Empire, and Global Conflict

Chima J. Korieh
Marquette University



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Acknowledgments

The idea for writing this book emerged after I had published a collection of petitions written by Nigerians during the Second World War. The letters were a reaction to several regulations and measures implemented by the British colonial authorities during World War II to channel colonial resources toward the war effort. The role that African soldiers played has become emblematic of colonial contributions to the war effort. However, these petitions and supplications were unprecedented in placing the civilian population in Nigeria at the intersection of colonial overrule, wartime economics, and management of wartime crisis. This book attempts to tell these other stories: of farmers, who produced the goods that supported the war; of market men and women, whose activities and roles were of no lesser value; and of many others, who labored at home and in the mines in the name of the empire. The stories of the rising cost of living that became more pronounced as the war raged on, labor shortages, the policies implemented to ameliorate these conditions, and their impact on those who experienced these conditions as colonial subjects helps to capture the complex histories of the era. Thus, if World War II is to be understood in its global context, it is important to understand different historical actors, regional experiences, and the concomitant effect of the global capitalist system on African colonial societies and economies. For the African men and women who participated in this global conflict as soldiers and those who engaged in a different array of work at home, their stories of heroism, suffering, stress, and growing dissatisfaction with the colonial order redefined imperial relations.

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Abbreviations

CO	Colonial Office
IWM	Imperial War Museum, London
NA	National Archives, London
NAC	National Archives of Nigeria, Calabar
NAE	National Archives of Nigeria, Enugu
NAI	National Archives of Nigeria, Ibadan
NAK	National Archives of Nigeria, Kaduna
RH	Rhodes House