In the History of Nigeria

Chinua Achebe’s autobiographical essay There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra is centered on the period of Nigeria’s civil war. The Biafra Republic’s attempt to secede was the cause of the civil war, from May 1967 to January 1970, that nearly tore Nigeria apart. Achebe discusses many facets of the creation of the republic and ensuing war. Some of these include the corrupt nature of the newly independent Nigerian government and the discrimination and violence against the Igbo people. He also provides details of his own involvement in the break-away Biafra Republic.

Inspired and informed by a close and analytical reading of Achebe’s book, and using at least 8 additional sources (excluding course materials), write an essay in which you explore a theme or event in this period of Nigerian history. In other words, you must draw your essay topic from Achebe’s book, but engage in additional research to inform your paper. You may use both primary and/or secondary sources and develop an informed argument about your chosen topic.

You are free to choose any subject, as long as it deals with the period of the Biafra war (1967-1970) and engages to some extent with Achebe’s autobiography.

Here are some examples of possible topics:
- the Igbo predicament
- the role of the educated elite in the Biafra Republic
- international attention to, or involvement in, the Biafra civil war
- chose an important historic figure (featured in Achebe’s memoir)
- what role did oil play in the civil war?
- what roles did women play in the conflict?

ADDITIONAL SOURCES AND RESOURCES

UCLA’s Research Library has an amazing collection of material on Nigerian history. Your task will be to select the most relevant readings for your chosen topic. If you need assistance navigating the library and finding sources, please contact the African Studies librarian, Ms. Ruby Bell-Gam (who happens to be Nigerian) at rbellgam@library.ucla.edu.

Examples of Primary Sources:

- Nigerian and/or international newspapers covering the period from the 1960s onward (available either in print or on microfilm at the Research Library). Here are some examples of Nigerian newspapers that were publishing in this period. These are their current websites. We may or may not have copies of these newspapers in our library. Alternatively, you may consult major newspapers (for example British, American or Canadian) that have online archives.
- The Guardian (well-known and independent of government control)
- Nigerian Tribune (a paper from Ibadan)
- Vanguard (another independent paper)

-Other autobiographies of Nigerians involved in the events covered by Achebe.

- Government reports, missionary sources...

Examples of Secondary Sources:

- Academic articles about Nigerian history published in scholarly journals (searchable through J-Stor, for example)

- History books written by historians and published by reputable publishers, such as university presses.

(N.B. internet sources such as webpages, Wikipedia etc. are not legitimate sources for this assignment).

FORMAT
You must write a coherent and structured essay where you defend your argument with historical information drawn from specific sources, including Achebe’s autobiography. Be sure to make clear references to these sources by using a standard referencing style.

The paper must be 15-16 pages in length, typed in 12-point font, double-spaced with one-inch margins, and include a title, page numbers, footnotes or endnotes, and a bibliography. Papers will be graded on originality, structure and style.