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The Aba Women's War of 1929: *A Historic Anti-Colonial Revolt in Nigeria*

By Chuka Odike

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FEATURE
IMAGE

**60th Anniversary re-enactment of
Women's Protest during Womens
War of 1929. Courtesy National
Museum Uyo**

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The Aba Women's War, also known as the "Women's War" in Igbo history, erupted in southeastern Nigeria in late 1929 as Igbo-Ibibio women protested oppressive colonial policies. This uprising, led by market women from Calabar and Owerri Provinces, was one of the most significant challenges to British rule in Nigeria, representing both a feminist and anti-colonial movement.

01

Origins and Catalyst

The war's roots trace back to 1914, when British colonial governor Lord Lugard implemented indirect rule through appointed "warrant chiefs," who began to abuse their authority. Tensions rose when British administrators proposed a tax on Igbo market women, who feared it would harm their livelihoods. The protest began in Oloko on November 18, 1929, when Chief Okugo's representative demanded a census of livestock and family members, angering a widow named Nwanyeruwa. Her confrontation with the chief's representative quickly mobilized thousands of women.

02

Expansion of Protests

The protest spread across Aba, Owerri, Ikot Ekpene, and other towns of the Calabar, Owerri Provinces as women rallied to resist taxation and warrant chief oppression. The protests involved both peaceful “sitting on” chiefs, a traditional form of social censure, and violent resistance. In Aba, the protests intensified, with the destruction of colonial buildings, banks, and factories. British forces responded with violence, resulting in numerous casualties.

03

Consequences and Legacy

The British government responded by curbing the power of warrant chiefs, canceling the tax plan, and establishing reforms that included appointing women to serve in some judicial capacities. The Aba Women's War left a lasting legacy, symbolizing the resistance of Nigerian women against colonial oppression and contributing to the decolonization movement in West Africa.

It is an encouraging feature of this unhappy incident that the responsible authorities in Nigeria, as in England, should have been so ready to face the fact that it resulted largely from defects in their government. Here the Aba riots point a moral that is applicable far beyond Nigeria. The difficulties in this region were exceptionally great. But beneath the peculiar local symptoms lie a pathological condition common to the whole of Negro Africa. It is produced by the sudden strain thrown upon primitive communities by the strong, all-embracing pressure of European influence. There are examples in various parts of the world of primitive peoples unexpectedly rebelling after years of apparent acquiescence in European rule, and their

conscious purposes often draw strength from what is at bottom an unconscious cultural protest. The reaction may not be expressed in this form; Some tribes endure the stress of change so quietly that their rulers do not observe their difficulties.

One relief for the desire for reassertion is found in the formation of secret societies or of quasi-Christian bodies independent of white control, whose proceedings express at once European influence and an anti-European attitude.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chuka Odi

I'm a dedicated civil engineer with a passion for infrastructure development and community empowerment. With a strong background in engineering, my work focuses on creating sustainable solutions for urban and rural development projects. Outside of my professional career, I'm deeply interested in Igbo history and culture. I actively explores ways to impact society by using historical lessons to inspire and educate others about the rich cultural heritage of the Igbo people, aiming to bridge tradition and modern development.



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