

BOOK REVIEW

John Campbell and Matthew T. Page. *Nigeria. What Everyone Needs to Know.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. xiv + 218 pp. Maps. Photographs. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$16.95. Paper. ISBN: 978-0190657987.

Nigeria. What Everyone Needs to Know, by former United States Ambassador to Nigeria John Campbell and U.S. Africa policy expert Matthew T. Page, makes legible an interrogative narrative about the Nigerian postcolonial condition that suggests the country holds much epistemic promise for general readers and policymakers interested in Africa's most populous country. As a potentially prosperous nation which exhibits signs of modernity, and despite a large segment of its population struggling with poverty, Nigeria itself propels questions about its national identity, democratic travails, and the current state of its socioeconomic development. As the book suggests, the country is a "troubled giant of Africa" (5), whose continent-wide impact is undermined by its tenuous institutions and widespread political corruption.

In many ways, Nigeria represents a conundrum to the international community, even as it remains a riddle to its own citizens. To respond to this riddle, the authors implement a stylistic structure following a question-answer approach that aligns with the inscrutable subject they eloquently write about. As they present incisive answers to the 72 questions tackled in the volume, the reader gets the sense that both questions and answers are the generative contexts that facilitate a robust understanding of Nigeria through the perspectives of two foreign allies. In other words, the questions we find in the pages of the book are as insightful as the answers provided. The most crucial of these is encountered when the authors ask at the beginning, "What is a Nigerian?" The pertinence of this question is not only signified by the frequency of the word "Nigerian" which is the second most used word in the text (after "Nigeria" itself), but also by the need to appreciate the social and cultural diversity of the people whose actions shape the country's external perceptions.

These questions are organized into seven sections: "Historical Background," "Economics of Oil," "Religion," "Politics: Nigeria's Great Game," "Nigeria's Security Challenges," "Nigeria and the World," and finally, "Nigeria of the Future." Together, these sections lucidly construct Nigeria for educated audiences around the world, especially in Euro-American locations where the

media sometimes traffic in essentializing narratives about the country. As a book written for “everyone,” therefore, *Nigeria. What Everyone Needs to Know* minimally employs academic apparatuses such as footnotes and excessively dizzying citations, while also astutely avoiding the burden of jargon and registers from political science that might otherwise hinder the effective communication of the volume’s excellent analyses.

Each of these segments offers compelling arguments on the Nigerian narrative that clarifies a contemporary account for the reader. For instance, the gerontocratic nature of Nigerian politics is well foregrounded even as it is connected to what Richard Joseph has previously characterized as prebendal democratic politics (*Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria: The Rise and Fall of the Second Republic*, Cambridge University Press, 1987)—what Campbell and Page explicate as official corruption among the political elite. Hence, the authors connect Nigeria’s historical great game of prebendalism and the politics of patronage to gender imbalances in political governance: given “the powerful role money, patronage, and old boys’ networks play in fueling Nigerian political careers, the preeminence of men has been somewhat self-perpetuating” (118). The section on religion underscores Campbell and Page’s attention to the significant role of religion in Nigerian sociocultural and political spaces. While Islam and inchoate manifestations of African traditional religions combine with different iterations of Christianity to shape religious expressions, Pentecostalism uniquely interpellates the Nigerian state as what Ebenezer Obadare refers to as a “Pentecostal Republic” (*Pentecostal Republic: Religion and the Struggle for State Power in Nigeria*, Zed Books, 2018). The ascendancy of religion in the framework of state power means that, for most Nigerians, the concept of “separation of church and state” is more about maintaining a balance of power between Islam and Christianity rather than an intrinsic belief in secularism (71–72).

These two sections are highlighted to showcase the authors’ impressive understanding of Nigeria’s many struggles and its hugely diverse peoples and cultures. While discussing the country’s numerous challenges, Campbell and Page yet emphasize some optimism about Nigeria’s future, signposting in the book’s conclusion ways in which the country can unlock its great potential through infrastructure development, anti-corruption crusade, military reform, and empowerment of women, among other strategies.

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For additional reading on this subject, the ASR recommends:

Emenyonu, Ernest Nneji. 1973. “Post-War Writing in Nigeria.” *Issue (Waltham, Mass.)* 3 (2): 49–54. doi:10.1017/S0047160700008726.

Mahmud, Sakah Saidu. 2004. “Nigeria.” *African Studies Review* 47 (2): 83–95. doi:10.1017/S0002020600030882.