

THE NIGER DELTA IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE, 1800–1960

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ABSTRACT

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria is a wealthy area. It is rich in natural resources, especially crude oil. The region is equally good for international trade because of its harbours which encourage the berthing of foreign trading vessels. Ironically, the Niger Delta has become a good illustration of the Shakespearean saying that “foul is fair and fair is foul.” With its abundant wealth, the Niger Delta region has become too restive and insecure because of the poverty and underdevelopment ravaging the people. This paper examines in historical perspective the blessings and curses of the region between 1800 and 1960. In the 1800s, the European mutual trade relations with the delta region were still at their best while in 1960 Nigeria was granted political independence, and oil exploration in the country was still at its teething stage with the first oil export from the country just in 1959. The study is thematic, using the historical methods of analysis and narration. Its data derive from the secondary sources. The paper argues that the misfortunes of the Niger Delta stem centrally from fortunes and greed. But particularly from European traders who spread the gospel of individual accumulation in the region and encouraged the people to accept and live by it.

KEYWORDS: Niger Delta, Trade, European Imperialists, Resource Control, Divide and Rule, Insecurity