

Columnists

Heroes of the struggle for Nigeria's independence/pioneer political, professional and business leaders

By **Editor**

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(FILES) In this file photo taken on November 16, 1955 Picture released on November 16, 1955 of first president of Nigeria, Nnamdi Azikiwe from 1963 to 1966. – On October 1, 2020, Nigeria celebrates its 60th independence from Britain. (Photo by – / AFP)

Abubakar Tafawa Balewa

Abubakar Tafawa Balewa was born in December 1912 in Bauchi State. His father, Yakubu Dan Zala, was of Gere and his mother Fatima Inna was of Gere and Fulani descent. Balewa was a legislator in Kaduna under the Macpherson Constitution of 1951 and federal legislators nominated to Lagos to become minister of Works in 1952. Later, he served as Minister of Transport.

As Prime Minister of Nigeria, Balewa, from 1960 to 1961, doubled as Foreign Affairs advocate of Nigeria. His portrait adorns the 5 Naira Note and the Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University in Bauchi is named in his honour.

• **Ahmadu Ibrahim Bello**

Ahmadu Ibrahim Bello, Sardauna of Sokoto, knighted as Sir Ahmadu Bello, built Northern Nigeria and served as its first and only premier from 1954 until his assassination in 1966. He was also the leader of the Northern Peoples Congress, the ruling party at the time, consisting of the Hausa-Fulani elite.

Bello masterminded the creation of Northern Nigeria Development Corporation (NNDC), Bank of the North, and Northern Nigeria Investments Ltd (NNIL). Bello initiated plans to modernise traditional Koranic education in Northern Nigeria. His greatest legacy was the modernisation and unification of the diverse people of Northern Nigeria. Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria is a monument named after him and his portrait adorns the 200 Naira banknote.

• **Eyo Ita**

Eyo Ita, a Nigerian educationist and politician from Ibeno, Akwa Ibom State. He led the Eastern Government of Nigeria in 1951. He was among the earliest Nigerian students to study in the United States. He was a deputy national president of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Ita was a member of Youth and Education movements, proprietor of West African People's Institute, Calabar, and National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC). He was elected Vice President after the death of Herbert Macaulay. Ita left NCNC to form the National Independence Party (NIP), which became one of the five Nigerian political parties that sent representatives to the July 27, 1953, London Conference on Nigerian Constitution.

• **Michael Athokhamien Imoudu**

He was a renowned Nigerian labour union leader. From 1947 to 1958, Imoudu was leader of various trade unions. He was president of All Nigeria Trade Union Federation, an effort at unification of various labour unions in the country. The federation enjoyed initial success, incorporating 45 out of the 57 registered unions

at the time. In 1986, Imodu was honoured with the establishment of Michael Imodu National Institute for Labour Studies (MINILS). The institute is one of its kind in West Africa.

• **Joseph Sarwuan Tarka**

Senator Joseph Sarwuan Tarka was a Nigerian politician from Benue State and a former Minister for Transport and later Communications under General Yakubu Gowon. He was one of the founding members of United Middle Belt Congress, a political organisation dedicated to protecting and advocating for the country's Middle Belt.

Tarka was a nominated member to the Nigerian Constitutional Conference of 1957 and was also the representative of the Middle Belt zone to the Henry Willinks Commission of 1958. In 1958, he was appointed as a shadow minister of commerce. Tarka was an advocate of state creation to give political and economical power to minority groups. He supported the creation of a Middle Belt state before the republic was truncated. He resigned in 1974. He was elected Senator for Benue East in 1979, and appointed chairman of Senate Committee on Finance and Appropriation, a position he held when he died on March 30, 1980, aged 48.

• **Chief Margaret Ekpo**

Chief Margaret Ekpo was a Nigerian women's rights activist and social mobiliser. She was a pioneer female politician in the country's First Republic and leading member of a class of traditional Nigerian women activists, many of who rallied women beyond notions of ethnic solidarity.

She later joined National Council of Nigeria and the Camerouns (NCNC), as a platform to represent marginalised groups. In the 1950s, she also teamed up with Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti to protest killings at Enugu coal miners; the victims were leaders protesting colonial practices at the mine. In 1953, Ekpo was nominated by the NCNC to the regional House of Chiefs, and in 1954 she established the Aba Township Women's Association. As leader of the new market group, she was able to garner the trust of a large number of women in the township and turn it into a political pressure group. By 1955, women in Aba had outnumbered men voters in a citywide election. She won a seat to the Eastern

Regional House of Assembly in 1961, a position that allowed her to fight for issues affecting women at the time.

In 2001, Calabar Airport was renamed Margaret Ekpo International Airport.

- Hajia Gambo Sawaba

She was Nigeria's women's rights activist, politician and philanthropist. She served as the deputy chairman of Great Nigeria People's Party and elected leader of the national women's wing of Northern Element Progressive Union (NEPU). Sawaba had the support of the Emirs and British Colonial Authority. She was a campaigner against under-aged marriages, forced labour and an advocate for western education in the north. Gambo made a name for herself when at a political lecture during her career in the North, she climbed up and spoke out in a room full of men.

She was mentored by Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti and travelled to meet her in Abeokuta years later. She is widely regarded as the pioneer of fighting for the



Opinion



- Nnamdi Azikiwe

Nnamdi Benjamin Azikiwe was born on November 16, 1904 and died May 11, 1996. Generally known as 'Zik of Africa,' Azikiwe was the first President of Nigeria from 1963 to 1966. Considered a driving force behind the nation's independence, he came to be known as the "father of Nigerian Nationalism."

Born to Igbo parents from Anambra State Eastern Nigeria in Zungeru in Niger State. He travelled to the United States and attended Storer College, Columbia University, the University of Pennsylvania and Howard University. He contacted colonial authorities with a request to represent Nigeria at the Los Angeles Olympics. He returned to Africa in 1934, where he began work as a journalist in the Gold Coast. In British West Africa, he advocated Nigerian and African nationalism as a journalist and a political leader.

Azikiwe became active in the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM), the country's first nationalist organization. He entered politics, co-founding the National Council of

Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) with Herbert Macaulay in 1944. Azikiwe became the council's secretary-general in 1946. He became governor-general on November 16, 1960, and became the first Nigerian named to the Privy Council of the United Kingdom. When Nigeria became a republic in 1963.

- Chief Obafemi Awolowo

Chief Obafemi Awolowo was born on March 6, 1909 in the Ijebu-Remo, Ikenne, Ogun State. He attended Baptist Boys' High School (BBHS), Abeokuta and Wesley College, Ibadan. In 1927, he enrolled at the University of London as an External Student and graduated with the degree of Bachelor of Commerce (Hons). He went to the UK in 1944 to study law at the University of London and was called to the Bar by the Honorable Society of the Inner Temple on 19 November 1946.

In 1949 Awolowo founded the Nigerian Tribune, a private Nigerian newspaper, which he used to spread nationalist consciousness among Nigerians. He played a key role in Nigeria's independence movement, the First and Second Republics and the Nigerian Civil War. In 1963, he was imprisoned for sedition and pardoned in 1966, after which he became Minister of Finance. In recognition of all of this, Awolowo was the first individual in the modern era to be named as the leader of the Yoruba (Asiwaju Awon Yoruba or Asiwaju Omo Oodua). Awolowo formed Action Group, where he led demands for a federal constitution, which was introduced in the 1954 Lyttleton Constitution, following primarily the model proposed by the Western Region delegation he led.

- Jaja Anucha Wachuku

Jaja Anucha Wachuku was born on January 1, 1918 and died November 7, 1996. Wachuku attended Infant School at St. Georges NDP Umuomainta, Nbwasi, Abia State. He was prince of Ngwaland. Wachuku was a Pan-Africanist and Nigerian statesman, lawyer, politician, diplomat and humanitarian. He was the first Speaker of the Nigerian House of Representatives as well as first Nigerian Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations. Also, Wachuku was the first Nigerian Minister for Foreign Affairs. He was the first African medalist, laureate in Oratory of Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland. He matriculated at Trinity College in 1939, and was elected Executive Member of the College Historical Society in 1941. Wachuku practised law in Dublin for three years before returning to Nigeria in 1947.

He was a favoured lecturer at Glover Memorial Hall, Lagos, where Wachuku provoked national controversy when he declared Lagos a “no-man’s land” – meaning that it was an all-Nigerian city – wherein all Nigerians were entitled to equal rights. From 1959 to 1960, Wachuku was the first indigenous Speaker of the House of Representatives of Nigeria. Under his leadership at the United Nations, both the Nigerian Army and the Nigerian Police Force made their début in international peacekeeping – under the auspices of the World Organisation.

- Chief Anthony Eromosele Enahoro

Chief Anthony Eromosele Enahoro (22 July 1923 – 15 December 2010) was one of Nigeria’s foremost anti-colonial and pro-democracy activists. He was born the eldest of 10 children in Uromi in Edo State of Nigeria. His Esan parents were Anastasius Okotako Enahoro (1900–1968) and Fidelia Victoria Inibokun (née Ogbidi Okojie –1906–1969). Enahoro had a long and distinguished career in the media, politics, the civil service and the pro-democracy movement. Educated at the Government School, Uromi, Government School, Owo, and King’s College, Lagos, Enahoro became the editor of Nnamdi Azikiwe’s newspaper, Southern Nigerian Defender, Ibadan, in 1944 at the age of 21, thus becoming Nigeria’s youngest editor ever. He later became the editor of Zik’s Comet, Kano, 1945–49, associate editor of West African Pilot, Lagos, and editor-in-chief of Morning Star from 1950 to 1953.

During the Nigerian crisis that followed the 1966 coups, Enahoro was the leader of the then Mid-West delegation to the Ad Hoc Constitutional Conference in Lagos. He later became Federal Commissioner (Minister) for Information and Labour under the General Yakubu Gowon Military Government, 1967–74; Federal Commissioner for Special Duties, 1975. He later became a member of the National Party of Nigeria, NPN, 1978–83. He was the president, World Festival of Negro Arts and Culture, 1972–75.

- Mallam Aminu Kano

Mallam Aminu Kano (1920—April 17, 1983) attended Katsina College and later went to the University of London’s Institute of Education. He earned his teaching certificate after completing his studies at Katsina College. Aminu Kano joined the Northern Elements Progressive Union as a political platform to challenge what he

felt was the autocratic and feudalistic actions of Northern Government. He geared his attack on the ruling elite including the emirs, who were mostly Fulanis. The potency of his platform was strengthened partly because of his background. His father was an acting Alkali in Kano who came from a lineage of Islamic clerics. He sought to use politics to create an egalitarian Northern Nigerian society.

- Chief Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti

Chief Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, born Frances Abigail Olufunmilayo Thomas (October 25, 1900 – 13 April 1978) was a Nigerian educator, political campaigner, suffragist, and women's rights activist. Born in Abeokuta, Nigeria, Ransome-Kuti was the first female student to attend the Abeokuta Grammar School. As a young adult, she worked as a teacher, organizing some of the first pre-school classes in the country and arranging literacy classes for low-income women.

In 1932, Ransome-Kuti helped establish the Abeokuta Ladies Club. The club focused on charity work, sewing, catering and adult education classes, and its early members were mostly Christian, Western-educated women from the middle class. By the 1940s, however, the club moved in more political direction. Inspired by an illiterate friend who asked her for help learning how to read, Ransome-Kuti began organizing literacy workshops for market women through the club, and she subsequently gained a greater understanding of social and political inequalities faced by many Nigerian women. In 1944, she developed a successful campaign to stop local authorities seizing rice from market women under false pretenses

- Shehu Usman Aliyu Shagari

Without being a military personnel, the late Alhaji Shehu Usman Aliyu Shagari served in government of Nigeria, uninterrupted, between 1954 and 1975, then 1979 and 1983, when he was the country's first executive president. The only time he was not in government was the six months of Major General Johnson Thomas Umunnakwe Aguiyi-Ironsi was Head of State, January 15, 1966 to July 29, 1966.

He briefly worked as a teacher before entering politics in 1951; and was elected into the House of Representatives in 1954. At various times, between 1958 through independence of Nigeria in 1960 and 1975, he held a cabinet post as federal minister.

In 1954, Shehu Shagari was elected into his first public office as a member of the federal House of Representative for Sokoto west. He was at different times, parliamentary secretary (1958 to 1959) to the Nigerian Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, and that year, he also served as the Federal Minister for Commerce and Industries.

Later, he served as the pioneer Federal Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Pensions and the Federal Minister for Internal Affairs and from 1965 up until the first military coup in January 1966, Shagari was the Federal Minister for Works and in 1967, he was appointed as the secretary for Sokoto Province Education Development Fund. From 1968–1969, Shagari was given a state position in the North Western State as Commissioner for Establishments.

- Shehu Musa Yar'Adua

Outsiders seem to think that Shehu Musa Yar'Adua, de facto second-in-command as Chief of Staff, Supreme Headquarters from 1976 to 1979, was very fortunate in both the military and political circle because of his elite background.

This widespread impression is far from the truth. He was a gentleman and an officer. He was respected for his tact and discipline. He was very calculative.

Born on March 5, 1943, Shehu Musa Yar'Adua was given the responsibility for the capture of Onitsha after two unsuccessful attempts by the Nigerian troops, which he did conveniently.

An astute and calculative politician, his political structure covered the country. He had a national campaign directorate, and each state had its own campaign coordinator and ward mobilisers. Members of his campaign group included former PDP chairman Anthony Anenih, former Vice President Atiku Abubakar, former minister Dapo Sarumi, Bola Tinubu, Abdullahi Aliyu Sumaila and Sunday Afolabi.

He provided, Chief M.K.O. Abiola the platform, which gave him victory in Jos, Plateau State.

- Moshood Kashimawo Olawale Abiola GCFR

Chief Moshood Kashimawo Olawale Abiola, also known as M. K. O. Abiola, was a

Nigerian businessman, publisher and politician. He was the Aare Ona Kankafo XIV of Yorubaland.

Abiola ran for the presidency in 1993, for which the election results were annulled by the military president, Ibrahim Babangida.

Abiola was awarded the GCFR posthumously on June 6, 2018 by President Muhammadu Buhari and Nigeria's democracy day was changed to June 12.

From 1972, until his death, Abiola had been conferred with 197 traditional titles by 68 different communities in Nigeria, in response to his having provided financial assistance in the construction of 63 secondary schools, 121 mosques and churches, 41 libraries, 21 water projects in 24 states of Nigeria, and he was grand patron to 149 societies or associations in Nigeria.

- Abdulsalami Abubakar GCFR

General Adulsalami Alhaji Abubakar was born on June 13, 1942.

Abubakar was a member of the pioneering sets of officer cadets who enlisted into the Nigerian Air force on October 3, 1963. From 1964 to 1966, he was flown to Uetersen, West Germany with a team of officer cadets, for Basic and Advance Military Training. When he returned to Nigeria in 1966 he was seconded to the Nigeria Army.

Although efforts were made to ensure that the elections were free and fair, there were widespread irregularities that drew criticism from foreign observers.

Surprising some critics of the country's military, In May 1999 General Abubakar, handed over power to the newly elected civilian president, Olusegun Obasanjo and retired from the army.

Abubakar helped in the Liberian peace movement by presiding over the 2003 peace talks between Charles Taylor and the opposing rebels.

He currently heads the National Peace Committee, which has ensured that the recent elections in the country have not exploded.

- Goodluck Ebele Azikiwe Jonathan GCFR

If you thought Goodluck Ebele Jonathan will become an old fixture in Nigeria's

political calculation after he lost the 2015 Presidential Election, you would be wrong.

Since 2015, when he lost the presidential election, marking the first time in the history of Nigeria that an incumbent president lost re-election and conceded defeat, his fame has grown larger than the small confinement that many were won't to ascribe to him.

Up to the point that he conceded defeat to Buhari, Jonathan was considered a neophyte, who did not have clout but just added up to the number. He defied all nay saying to become one of the greatest statesmen that have traversed the Fourth Republic.

Born on November 20, 1957, in Ogbia, Bayelsa State to a Christian family of canoe makers, from the Ijaw minority ethnic group. He received a bachelor degree in zoology (second-class honours), a master's degree in hydrobiology and fisheries biology; and a doctorate in zoology from the University of Port Harcourt.

Before his entry into politics in 1998, he worked as an education inspector, a lecturer and an environmental-protection officer.

Jonathan was instrumental in negotiating an agreement with many of the major militant groups in the Niger Delta, to lay down their weapons and stop fighting as part of a government amnesty.

On February 9, 2010, following a controversial doctrine of necessity from the Nigerian Senate, Goodluck Jonathan was named acting President due to President Yar'Adua's trip to Saudi Arabia in November 2009 for medical treatment.

In accordance with the order of succession in the Nigerian constitution following President Umaru Yar'Adua's death on 5 May 2010, acting President Goodluck Jonathan was sworn in as the substantive President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria on 6 May 2010.

- Chief Frederick Rotimi Alade Williams

Chief Frederick Rotimi Alade (FRA) Williams, QC, SAN (16 December 1920 – 26 March 2005) was a foremost lawyer, nationalist and statesman. He was the first lawyer to adorn the silk as Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN). His unflinching

dedication to the rule of law for over six decades manifested in Williams' clear emergence as the foremost legal icon, a *primus inter pares* at the Nigerian Bar.

Throughout his practice years, he was graceful in his fine grasp of legal intricacies, erudition of the law and dexterity of submissions. He was as complete in substantive law as he was in court processes and rules. He was also endowed with his distinctive courage that made him speak out on sensitive national issues, both as an individual and chairman of The Patriots, a non-political, non-governmental organisation he co-founded.

- Chief Akintola Williams

Chief Akintola Williams (born August 9, 1919), a living legend at 101, is revered for his high level of professionalism and his record of achievements and legacies, which have made him the 'Father of the Accountancy profession' in Nigeria in particular and Africa in general.

He was the first African to qualify as a chartered accountant. He began his education at Olowogbowo Methodist Primary School, Bankole Street, Apongbon, Lagos Island, in the early 1930s, the same school his late younger brother, Chief FRA Williams attended. In 1965, Williams became one of the founding members and the first President of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (ICAN) – a leading Institute in Africa today. Also, as a catalyst of economic development and agent of positive change, Williams championed the establishment of the Nigerian Stock Exchange (NSE) in 1960, a market that he is actively involved in till date as an adviser to the operators.

- Major-Gen. Johnson Umunnakwe Aguiyi-Ironsi

Major-General Johnson Thomas Umunnakwe Aguiyi-Ironsi, MBE (3 March 1924 – 29 July 1966) was Nigeria's first Military Head of State. He seized power amidst the ensuing chaos following the January 15, 1966 coup, which decapitated the country's leadership.

He ruled from January 16, 1966 until his assassination on July 29, 1966 by a group of mutinous officers, who were led by Major Theophilus Danjuma, in a revolt against his government in what was popularly called the July Counter Coup. He spent 194 days in office, the shortest of any military Head of State and is one of the

five heads of government who died in office. The other four were Tafawa-Balewa, Murtala Mohammed, Sani Abacha and Umar Yar'Adua.

Vice Admiral Joseph Edet Akinwale Wey

Vice Admiral Joseph Edet Akinwale Wey (March 6, 1918 – December 12, 1991) was the first Nigerian Chief of Naval Staff. The former Nigerian national soccer team left back joined the Marine Department in 1939, as a Trainee Junior Technical Assistant. When the Navy was established in 1956, he crossed over to the Navy in 1957 and was commissioned in 1958.

A Vice Admiral of the Nigerian Navy, he served at various times as head of the Nigerian Navy (Chief of Naval Staff), acting Foreign Minister, and Chief of Staff of the Supreme Headquarters, making him the de facto Vice President of Nigeria during Yakubu Gowon's regime.

• Chief Louis Orok Edet

Chief Louis Orok Edet (1914–1979) was the Inspector General of the Nigeria Police Force from 1964–1966 and the first Nigerian to occupy the position. He was briefly the chairman of the Nigerian Football Association in the early 1960s.

On retirement after the 1966 coup, he was appointed Recruitment Attaché in the Nigerian High Commission in London, 1966–1968. After the civil war, he returned to Nigeria and was made Commissioner for Home Affairs and Information in the then South-Eastern State, 1968–72.

• Major-Gen. Abdullahi Mohammed

Major-General Abdullahi Mohammed was the pioneer Director General of the National Security Organisation from 1976 to 1979, created under Decree Number 27 of 1976 by the military regime of Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo after the failed Dimka coup, which claimed the life of Murtala Mohammed. The NSO was given a mandate of coordinating internal security, foreign intelligence and counterintelligence activities.

He also served as Chief of Staff to Presidents Olusegun Obasanjo and Umaru Musa Yar'Adua from 1999 to 2008; National Security Adviser to Gen. Abdusalami Abubakar from 1998 to 1999; and Governor of Benue & Plateau State, from July 1975 to February 1976 during the military regime of Gen. Murtala Mohammed.

- Prof. Thomas Adeoye Lambo

Professor Thomas Adeoye Lambo, OBE (March 29, 1923 – March 13, 2004) was a Nigerian scholar, administrator and psychiatrist. He is credited as the first western-trained psychiatrist in Africa. Between 1971 and 1988, he worked at the World Health Organization, becoming the agency's Deputy Director General. In 1954, after studying and working as a surgeon in Britain, Lambo returned to Nigeria where he was soon made the specialist in charge at the newly built Aro Psychiatric Hospital, Abeokuta.

- Prof. Kenneth Dike

Professor Kenneth Onwuka Dike (17 December 1917 – 26 October 1983) was an historian and the first indigenous Vice-Chancellor of the premier college, the University of Ibadan. He was a trailblazer in defense of African culture and historical studies. His African-centered orientation contributed to the development of historical consciousness of Africa, and the popularization of the use of oral sources and material culture in African historical method. He played a critical role in the rise of modern African historiography.

- Captain Chinyere Kalu

Captain Chinyere Kalu, MFR, is the first Nigerian female commercial pilot and the first woman to fly an aircraft in Nigeria. She served as the Rector and Chief Instructor of the Nigerian College of Aviation Technology between October 2011 and February 2014. She is a member of the Nigerian Women Achievers Hall of Fame and also a member of the Order of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, which was conferred on her in 2006.

- Lieutenant Wellington Bassey

Lieutenant Wellington Duke Bassey was the first commissioned officer of the Nigerian Army. His number was NA1 and WA1. He is an Efik from Cross River State (now Akwa Ibom) who joined the army in 1936. He was commissioned Lieutenant on April 30, 1949.

- Prof. Grace Alele-Williams

Professor Grace Alele-Williams (born December 16, 1932) is an educator who made history in 1985 when she became the first female Vice-Chancellor of an African university at the University of Benin. She was also the first Nigerian

woman to receive a doctorate degree. She is a professor of mathematics education, an area of academia women sparsely delve into.

- Louis Phillip Odumegwu Ojukwu

Louis Phillip Odumegwu Ojukwu, OBE (1909– September 1966) was a business tycoon, founder of Ojukwu Transport, Ojukwu Stores and Ojukwu Textiles. At his peak, he was the first and founding president of the Nigerian Stock Exchange as well as president of the African Continental Bank. He was considered the wealthiest person in Nigeria at the time, was Nigeria's first recorded millionaire and father of the leader of defunct Biafran Republic, Dim Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu.

- Alhassan Dantata

Alhassan Dantata (1877 – 17 August 1955) was a trader in kolanuts and groundnuts, as well as a distributor of European goods. He supplied large British trading companies with raw materials and also had business interests in the Gold Coast. At the time of his death he was the wealthiest man in West Africa. He is the great grandfather of Africa's richest man today, Aliko Dangote.

- Chief Timothy Adeola Odutola

Chief Timothy Adeola Odutola (1902–1995), OBE, CFR, CON, was a prominent businessman from Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State. He was one of the pioneers of modern Nigerian indigenous entrepreneurship and the first president of the Manufacturers Association of Nigeria. He created a multimillion-dollar conglomerate, including three factories, a retail franchise, a cattle ranch, a 5,000-acre plantation, a sawmill, and an exporting business before the end of British colonial rule in 1960.

- Samuel Manuwa

Samuel Layinka Ayodeji Manuwa was a pioneering Nigerian surgeon, Inspector General of Medical Services and former Chief Medical Adviser to the Federal Government of Nigeria. He was the first Nigerian to pass the FRCS and he obtained the postgraduate Doctor of Medicine degree from the University of Edinburgh in 1934. In 1966, he was elected president of the World Federation for Mental Health.

He received a bachelor's degree in Chemistry and Medicine in 1926. He graduated with several awards, winning every prize available in the medical school,

including the Robert Wilson Memorial Prize in Chemistry and the Welcome Prize in Medicine. He later went to study in Liverpool, and completed a course on Tropical Medicine. He became a medical doctor in 1926.

He returned to Nigeria in 1927 after finishing his studies on tropical medicine and joined the colonial medical services as a medical officer. He subsequently became a surgeon specialist and senior specialist in the service, where he gained acclaim as a skilled surgeon. Though he received various offers for administrative positions early on, he continued his surgical work for more than 18 years. While practising as a surgeon, he invented an excision knife to treat tropical ulcers.

• Taslim Olawale Elias

Taslim Olawale Elias was a Nigerian jurist. He was Attorney-General and Chief Justice of Nigeria and a judge and President of the International Court of Justice. Elias was born into the traditional aristocracy of Lagos, then the capital of Nigeria, on November 11, 1914. He received his secondary education at the Church Missionary Society Grammar School and Igbobi College in Lagos.

In 1960, Elias was invited to become Nigeria's Attorney-General and Minister of Justice. He served in this capacity through the whole of the first republic. Although later dismissed after the coup d'état in January 1966, he was reinstated in November of that year.

In October 1975, he was elected by the General Assembly and the Security Council of the United Nations to the International Court of Justice at The Hague. In 1979, he was elected Vice-President by his colleagues on that Court. In 1981, after the death of Sir Humphrey Waldock, the President of the Court, he took over as Acting President. In 1982, the members of the Court elected him President of the Court. He thus became the first African jurist to hold that honour. Five years later, Elias was also appointed to the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague.

• Emeka Anyaoku

Chief Eleazar Chukwuemeka (Emeka) Anyaoku was born on January 18, 1933, in Obosi, Nigeria. Not only is he a chief through lineage, but also through his exceptional leadership skills. His career in leadership spans many decades and institutions, both national and internationally. The promotion of democracy on the African continent has always been his primary focus and an area of concern.

His precociousness in leadership showed when he joined the Commonwealth Development Corporation at the tender age of 26, in 1959.

His exceptional contribution to the struggle for freedom, justice and democracy in South Africa and on the African continent and for persistent efforts to promote the attainment of democracy and good governance on the African continent.

In 1989, Chief Anyaoku was elected the third Commonwealth Secretary General. He proved an indispensable leader in matters of national, continental and international political leadership and was re-elected at the 1993 Limassol Commonwealth Heads of Governments Meeting for a second five-year term.

Chief Anyaoku's strength in leadership can be seen in his active involvement in issues such as the Gibraltar referendum of 1967, the Nigerian civil war of 1967 to 1970, the St Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla constitutional crisis of 1969 to 1970, the problems following Commonwealth Games' boycotts during the 1980s and the process leading to peace and democracy in Zimbabwe, Namibia and, in particular, South Africa. Chief Anyaoku was also closely involved in the establishment of a joint office in New York for small Commonwealth countries that are thus enabled to be represented at the UN.

• Chioma Ajunwa-Opara

When Chioma Ajunwa-Opara, also known as Chioma Ajunwa, was suspended from athletics, in 1992, for failing a dope test, it seemed her world had ended. Her ambition? Crashed, too?

But four years later, she made a great comeback.

Following the completion of her suspension, Ajunwa went on to become the first West-African woman, as well as the first Nigerian, to win an Olympic gold medal in a track and field event when she emerged victorious in the women's long jump event at the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta, with a jump length of 7.12 meters (on her first attempt) during the final.

The 'flying police woman' is the first black African woman to win an Olympic gold medal in a field event. She is the first and only woman to compete in the FIFA Women's World Cup as a footballer as well as the Olympic games doing track and field.

Born December 25, 1970, into what she describes as 'a very poor home', the Ahiazu-Mbaise-native Ajunwa is the last of nine children, with six brothers and two sisters. Her father died while she was still young, leaving his wife to solely support a large family.

- Stephen Okechukwu Keshi

Stephen Okechukwu Keshi, popularly called 'Skippon', until death, was a strong influence in Nigerian football. For the over 50 years he spent on earth, he bestrode the football pitch like a colossus.

From his primary school days at Saint Paul's Catholic Nursery and Primary School, Apapa Road, Lagos State, and later, at Saint Finbarrs' College, Akoka, Lagos, he showed leadership qualities.

Born on January 23, 1962, in Azare, Bauchi State, he hailed from Illah, Oshimili North Council, Delta State.

During his playing career, Keshi earned 60 caps for the Nigeria national team, making him the nation's second-most capped player at the time of his retirement. He represented the country at the 1994 FIFA World Cup and the 1994 Africa Cup of Nations, captaining the Super Eagles to victory in the latter.

Aside from opening the floodgates for many Nigerian footballers to go professional, as a manager, Keshi achieved success by qualifying Togo for the only FIFA World Cup appearance in its history in 2006. However, he left the position prior to the tournament and was replaced by Otto Pfister. He later coached his native Nigeria, where he became one of only two people, along with Egypt's Mahmoud El-Gohary, to have won the Africa Cup of Nations as both a player and a coach.

Keshi set a record in African football by being the first African coach to qualify two African nations (Nigeria and Togo) for the World Cup Finals in 2005 and in 2013. He also helped Nigeria become the first country to achieve an African Cup of Nations trophy and World Cup qualification, both in 2013.

- Nwankwo Kanu

Nwankwo Kanu remains the only Nigeria who was named African Footballer of the Year twice.

He is the most decorated Nigerian footballer, and with George Finidi, won the UEFA Champions League in 1994.

Kanu participated in the 1998, 2002 and 2010 FIFA World Cups. On June 24, 2010, he ended his international career following Nigeria's exit from the 2010 World Cup in South Africa. He won 86 caps and scored 13 goals for his country and was the joint most capped Nigerian player of all-time alongside Muda Lawal, until Joseph Yobo surpassed both players in 2012, winning his 87th cap.

- Richard 'Dick Tiger' Ihetu

Richard Ihetu, known widely as Dick Tiger, was born on August 14, 1929, in Amaigbo, Orlu, Imo State. The Nigerian professional boxer was world middleweight (160 pounds) and light heavyweight (175 pounds) champion during the 1960s.

In 1959, Tiger began boxing in the United States, and on October 23, 1962, he won the World Boxing Association (WBA) middleweight title with a 15-round decision (a fight whose outcome is determined by judges' scoring) over American Gene Fullmer.

Tiger also won a 15-round decision for the world light heavyweight title over Puerto Rican, José Torres, making him the first Nigerian to be world champion in two different weight categories. Tiger was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 1991.

- Hogan 'Kid' Bassey

Born Okon Asuquo Bassey on the banks of the Cross River, Creek Town, Calabar, Nigeria, and became naturalised British when he moved to the UK, where he spent most of his life in Liverpool. He took the name 'Kid' Bassey when he turned professional as a boxer. He was managed by and trained by George Biddles and Jimmy August.

Hogan 'Kid' Bassey was the first man of Nigerian descent to become a world boxing champion.

After winning the Empire featherweight championship, he won the world crown by defeating French Algerian Cherif Hamia in Paris in 1957. He lost the title to US fighter Davey Moore on March 18, 1959.

In 1959, he was awarded the MBE following his world title win and went on to become a coach in Nigeria, which awarded him the country's highest honour in 1973.

- Michael Okpala

Michael Okpala, also known as 'Power Mike', was a household name in the world of wrestling as a retired undefeated World Heavyweight wrestling champion

Power Mike was born on August 8, 1939 to Echeobi and Janet Okpala at Neni, in Anaocha Council of Anambra State.

It was at this primary school that he started building his athletic career by being active in sporting events. He was so interested in boxing that he became an amateur boxer.

He joined the Dick Tiger Boxing Club as a middle weight amateur boxer. It was here that Dick Ihetu Tiger became his role model.

He started a superman show business, which made him popular locally. Showmanship took him around the world in the mid-1950s. His act included such feats as using his bare hands to bend a six-inch nail, lifting four heavy men with ease, engaging several men in a game of tug-of-war, using bare hands to break a coconut and so on.

However, he later became an acclaimed wrestler and one of the best that Greece could boast of at the time. He wrestled with and defeated Ali Baba of Lebanon in 1973. Johnny Kwango also became a victim of Power Mike's when he (Mike) defeated him in Lagos. Among the list of wrestlers that Power Mike defeated were Power Jack, Joseph Kovacs, Judd Harris, John Tiger of Canada and a host of other notable worldwide superstars.

Apart from his pro wrestling prowess, he was also a promoter of the sport and his Power Mike International Promotions brought foreign wrestlers like Mil Mascaras, Dick the 'Bulldog Brower', Buddy Rose, Michael Hayes, Mighty Igor, The Mongols, Carlos Colon, Chris Adams, Thunderbolt Williams and so on to the shores of Nigeria. He retired from active wrestling in 1976 and then focused on international promotions.

- Prof. Wole Soyinka

Some African writers see Prof. Wole Soyinka as Nigeria's equivalent of the English playwright, William Shakespeare. Born on July 13, 1934, in Abeokuta, in the present day Ogun State, as Akinwande Oluwole Babatunde Soyinka.

Winning the Nobel Laurel in 1986 marked the apogee of Soyinka's accomplishments as an essayist, playwright and poet. As the first African to win the prized Nobel award, Soyinka has within the past half a century employed his craft as a social critic to influence and affect leadership and governance in Nigeria and Africa.

- Prof. Chinua Achebe

Born as Chinualumogu Albert Achebe (November 16, 1930 – March 21, 2013), the professor of Language and Literature devoted a greater part of his 83 years on earth advocating for the arrest of the growing cluttering of African literature and leadership through western cultural influences.

Well known for his masterpiece, *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe used his literary prowess to call global attention to social issues arising from clash of cultures in the African continent.

Apart from the iconic *Things Fall Apart* that has been translated into many world languages, Achebe's other notable works include, *No Longer At Ease*, *Arrow of God*, *Man of the People* and *Anthills of Savannah*.

- Prof. John Pepper Clark

Popularly known as J.P. Clark, John Pepper Clark-Bekeredemo is Nigeria's leading poet. He was born on April 6, 1935 to an Ijaw father and Urhobo mother. J.P.

Clark served as a professor of English at the University of Lagos, after a stint as a research fellow, Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan.

The accomplished playwright and dramatist, his work, *Song of a Goat*, stands out as evidence of his authority as one of Africa's pre-eminent and distinguished authors. His *America, Their America* came out as an outstanding critique of American society and values.

- Fela Anikulapo Kuti

ALTHOUGH he was just 22 years when Nigeria got her independence from Britain, changed his name from Olufela Ransome Kuti to Fela Anikulapo Kuti as a signal to the life of protest against cultural imperialism and colonial overhang.

A multi-talented musician, Fela pioneered the Afrobeat genre, which was made possible by the fact of his multi-instrumental expertise through which he fused traditional Yoruba music into funk and jazz.

With his Egypt80 band, Fela was a torn in the flesh of dictatorial regimes and corrupt leaders, particularly his *Beast of No Nation* and *Teacher, Don't Teach Me Nonsense* albums. He stood out as a composer, political activist and Pan-Africanist through his unique Afrobeat music genre.

- Dr. Ladi Kwali Dosei

Born to Gbagy parents, Ladi Kwali distinguished herself as a ceramicist, glassworker and potter through her creative ingenuity in introducing art into the pot making vocation of her native Kwali village of gwari sub-ethnic group in Nigeria.

She made large pots for use as water jars, cooking pots, bowls, and flasks from coils of clay, inscribing various decorative murals on them.

As a mark of recognition of her exploits and contributions to positive expression of the female gender, she was awarded a Doctorate and a Member of the British Empire as well as having her picture adorn Nigeria's N20 note.

- Ben Enwonwu

Odinigwe Benedict Chukwukadibia Enwonwu was born on July 14, 1917. He became one of the pioneers of African art and emerged also as one the first African artists to win international applause.

A product of University of London, Enweonu inherited his father's tools as a sculptor and went ahead to perfect the art of carving in line with Igbo indigenous sculpture.

Enweonu's portrait of the Ife Princess, Tutu, which he painted in 1973, was sold in auction for 1, 205, 000 pounds. Tutu was adopted as Nigeria's national icon and conveyed as a symbol of reconciliation after the Nigeria-Biafra civil war.

Before his death on February 5, 1994, Enweonwu was awarded Nigeria National Order of Merit for his contributions to art in the country.

- Honourable Justice Maryam Aloma Mukhtar GCON

SIX years after Nigeria's independence, Maryam Aloma Mukhtar was called to the English Bar. She shattered the iron ceiling for the womenfolk as far as the legal profession was involved by emerging as the first female Chief Justice of Nigeria after a long train of male jurists beginning from Sir Darnley Alexander.

Born on November 20, 1944, Justice Mukhtar was also the first female lawyer from Northern Nigeria, first female judge of High Court in Kano State Judiciary and the first female justice of the court of Appeal of Nigeria.

- Chief Gani Fawhehinmi

Noted for his legal activism and pursuit of human rights, Chief Abdul-Ganiyu Oyesola Fawhehinmi bestrode Nigeria's socio-political firmament like a colossus.

In his socio-political exploits using the instrumentality of the law, Gani was fond of taking cases involving indigent members of the society on pro-bono basis, a development that earned him the accolade of Senior Advocate of the Masses at a time he was being denied elevation to the prestigious Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN) status on account of his non conformist approach to litigating against the powers that be.

- Stella Ameyo Adadevoh

History has a way of bringing people to limelight. Stella Ameyo Adadevoh is one of such people that grabbed what history thrust on her. Though the daughter of Babatunde Kwaku Adadevoh, former Vice chancellor of the University of Lagos and great-grand daughter of Herbert Heelas Samuel Macaulay, she was not known until she correctly diagnosed Liberian Patrick Sawyer as Nigeria's first case of Ebola at First Consultant Hospital in Lagos, in July 2014.

Dr. Adadevoh kept Patrick Sawyer in the hospital despite his insistence that he simply had a bad case of malaria. Sawyer wanted to attend a business conference in Calabar, Nigeria. Adadevoh led the team that oversaw Sawyer's treatment.

Dr. Adadevoh also kept Patrick Sawyer at the hospital despite receiving a request from the Liberian ambassador to release him. She tried to create an isolation area,

despite the lack of protective equipment, by raising a wooden barricade outside Patrick Sawyer's door.

Her heroic effort saved the nation from widespread infection. At the time of these events, Nigerian doctors were on strike, which could have led to severe crises.

The professionalism and thorough medical examination carried out by Dr. Ameyo Adadevoh was impeccable. Adadevoh also provided staff with relevant information about the virus, procured protective gear and quickly contacted relevant officials.

As a result of her report, the Nigerian government declared a national public health emergency and the Nigerian Ministry of Health set up an Ebola Emergency Operations Centre.

• Chukwuemeka 'Dim' Odumegwu-Ojukwu

Even in death, Dim Chukwuemeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu remains a subject of discussion in Nigeria for his fight against injustice. Aside from being leader of the breakaway Republic of Biafra from 1967 to 1970, Emeka, who was born on November 4, 1933 at Zungeru, Niger State, was active as a politician from 1983 to 2011, when he died.

In 1944, he was involved in a controversy leading to his brief imprisonment for assaulting a British teacher who put down a student strike action that he was a part of at King's College, Lagos.

He joined the civil service in Eastern Nigeria as an Administrative Officer at Udi, in present-day Enugu State. In 1957, after two years of working with the colonial civil service and seeking to break away from his father's influence over his civil service career, he left and joined the military initially enlisting as a non-commissioned officer (NCO) in Zaria.

Ojukwu's decision to enlist as an NCO was forced by his father's (Sir Louis) pulling of political strings with the then Governor-General of Nigeria (John Macpherson) to prevent Emeka from getting an officer-cadetship.

Sir Louis and Governor-General Macpherson believed Emeka would not stick to the grueling NCO schedule, however, Emeka persevered. After an incident in

which Ojukwu corrected a drill sergeant's mispronunciation of the safety catch of the Lee-Enfield .303 rifle, the British Depot Commander recommended Emeka for an officer's commission.

From Zaria, Emeka proceeded first, to the Royal West African Frontier Force Training School in Teshie, Ghana and next, to Eaton Hall where he received his commission in March 1958 as a 2nd Lieutenant.

He was one of the first and few university graduates to receive an army commission. He later attended Infantry School in Warminster, the Small Arms School in Hythe. Upon completion of further military training, he was assigned to the Army's Fifth Battalion in Kaduna.

- General Yakubu Gowon GCFR

HE holds the singular record of serving, not only as Nigeria's military head of state at the tender age of 29, but also at a time of great socio-political upheaval. General Gowon's name was turned into an acronym-Go On With One Nigeria- to highlight the need for Nigeria's unity after the 30-month fratricidal civil war.

- General Murtala Ramat Mohammed GCFR

General Murtala Mohammed took the state creation approach to further from the 12 states created by Gowon to 19, in a bid to stabilize the country. Murtala radically changed the tempo of governance, by waging war against official graft, inflation of contracts and poor approach to public service.

- General Olusegun Aremu Obasanjo GCFR

From being the unwilling successor to the Murtala regime, General Obasanjo made history as the first military junta to organize a timely return of political power to the civilians.

The Obasanjo military regime has to its credit, the 1979 constitution, which was the product of the 1978 constituent assembly, as well as the change of governance from parliamentary to presidential system. He repeated the feat again in 2007 when he conducted the first civilian to civilian transition with his handover to President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua.

- General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida GCFR

General Ibrahim Babangida's place in the history of Nigeria's socio-political

progression is chequered. Under Babangida, for the first time, Nigeria had a military president, conveying the idea of a diarchy.

From the structural adjustment Programme, through the creation of effective public works agency, Department for Food Roads and Rural Infrastructure, the IBB administration affected the economic liberalization of the country. The convoluted transition to civil rule programme that culminated in the annulment of the 1993 presidential election dimmed the luster of the administration.

- Chief Ernest Shonekan GCFR

AS a boardroom mogul, Chief Shonekan's National Interim Government became a child of circumstance, when public outrage and discontent over the annulment of the 1993 presidential election forced Babangida to step aside for the country to move forward.

Shonekan was not allowed to bring his wealth of experience garnered at the top echelon of the management of United African Company (UAC) to bear on the leadership of the interim government.

General Sani Abacha GCFR

Despite dismantling the quasi-democratic structures build around the interim administration of Shonekan, of which he was a member, General Sani Abacha prepared to perpetuate himself in office as military head of state by transmuting to a civil president.

However, Abacha, a member of the military club that held Nigeria together, delivered for the country a prodigious mass housing programme at Gwarimpa with the Federal Capital Territory..

- Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar'Adua GCFR

His was about the most clement civilian administration in the nation's fourth republic. As the first university-educated Nigerian leader, Yar'Adua sought reform the electoral process and deepen the country's democracy through unbending adherence to the rule of law.

Born on August 1951, nine years before Nigeria's independence, Yar'Adua was born into a political family because his father was a minister of Lagos in the first republic. He died on May 5, 2010, three years into his term as Nigeria's president.

- General Theophilus Yakubu Danjuma GCON, fss

Popularly known as T.Y. Danjuma, the Takum-born soldier and politician was part of Nigeria's contingent on the United Nations' peacekeeping force to Katanga, Congo, three years after Nigeria's independence.

Danjuma was involved at several epochs of Nigeria's socio-political development and served as Defence minister in the fourth republic under President Olusegun Obasanjo. He retired from the military into a flourishing business career in Nigeria's oil and gas industry

- Muhammadu Buhari

The return of Major-General Muhammadu Buhari, former Head of State as president in 2015 marked the first time in the nation's history there would be a change of government from a political party to its bitterest rival. The president returned to power 30 years after a military coup masterminded by Gen. Ibrahim Babangida (rtd), his then Chief of Army Staff, sacked him as the military head of state. He has also equaled national statesman, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo's enviable record of leading Africa's most populous country twice.

Buhari has also made history as the first opposition candidate in the nation's political history to dislodge an incumbent president from power after three attempts.

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