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BIOGRAPHY

He Dared: The Story of Okuku Udo Akpabio, the Great Colonial African Ruler
Offonmbuk C. Akpabio
Xlibris
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Five Stars (out of Five)

Set in Akwa Ibom, Nigeria, among the Annang people, *He Dared* is a detailed biography of an African ruler unknown to most American readers. The story might best be summed up by Offonmbuk C. Akpabio's own allusion to the title of the classic novel, *Things Fall Apart*, by Nigerian author Chinua Achebe, taken from William Butler Yeats' poem "The Second Coming": "Things fall apart, the centre cannot hold." Like a great tree rooted in the middle of change, Okuku Udo Akpabio dares to weather the storm.

First depicted in the English language in *Ten Africans*, by Margery Perham (1936), the story of Udo Akpabio might feel disorienting at first. A village spreads in the middle of palm orchards and yam fields and grazing livestock, as well as small plots of *afang*, *nkong afere*, and melons cut from a thick, dangerous forest full of life, tradition, taboo, sacrifice, and fear of reprisals from vaguely familiar gods. There is also danger from the outlying tribes who would as likely kill a traveler as enslave them, and from the swarming Europeans, who bring tantalizing opportunity for trade and unwanted salvation.

Into this tradition, Udo Akpabio appears: "Udo Akpabio stood well over six feet tall, was huge, and was light in complexion with a deep voice. He exuded the ease and confidence of a man successful with the work of his hands. Nonetheless, underneath this intimidating stance was a man who had an infectious laugh and knack for friendship and generosity." Through his nine decades of life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, during which he fathered many children (including twenty sons) from various wives, Udo Akpabio dominates the social landscape. Despite a rough start in life, he works diligently to overcome a burden of debt and emerges as a respected farmer, trader, businessman, and finally the ruler of the entire village. His attitude towards change is always one of patience and acceptance. He sets aside land for a Christian mission. Choosing to indulge the English colonists by sending his children to their schools, he hopes that somehow they will overcome their invaders. He weathers tribal invasions, post-slavery colonialism, large-scale war, rebellion, and peace, and does so with acumen and

patient resolve. Through his strength and compassion, Udo Akpabio succeeds in real life where Achebe's fictional protagonist, Okonquo, fails in *Things Fall Apart*.

Okuku Udo Akpabio's current legacy is secure: he is the grandfather of Godswill Obot Akpabio, current governor of the Nigerian state of Akwa Ibom.

Offonmbuk C. Akpabio describes herself as a legal practitioner in Abuja, Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria. She has authored several fiction books, including *Destiny's Web*. *He Dared* is a very well-written, painstakingly documented, and worthwhile historical account for the Nigerian people to share with the world.

Dereck Cram