

## **British Attempt at Developing Cotton as an Export Crop from Esan, Edo State, Nigeria, 1902-1925**

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**ABSTRACT** Cotton (*G. vitifolium*) was indigenous in Esan cultivated and utilized for weaving of cloth and consumption of seeds as food. It met the needs of the people throughout the pre-colonial period and by the inception of colonial rule in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the demand for cotton assumed a new dimension. Foreign varieties of cotton seeds were introduced by British agents while Esan farmers were encouraged to cultivate it as an export crop. As long as the new type of cotton fetched a good price in the market, Esan farmers cultivated it side by side with the local type which they used in weaving the indigenous cloth. But during World War 1, when prices of produce including cotton fell Esan farmers lost will to cultivate cotton generally as more foreign fabrics came into the markets. This position remained until the end of the colonial period despite the fertile nature of Esan land for cotton growing and British attempt at developing cotton as an export crop from the area.