

RACE: FLASHPOINTS, 1895-1914

Last of the Zulus

In 1906 there was trouble with the Zulus in Natal.

A new poll tax was levied on the Zulus.
Some of them refused to pay it, and set on the cops sent out to make 'em,
with spears.

Two white policemen were stabbed to death.

It wasn't a big deal – just a big opportunity.

Natal declared martial law.
Court martials rounded up Zulus and executed a dozen of them.

Kind of severe, wasn't it? The British Government sent a very shirty telegram
to the governor of Natal.

The whole Government of Natal quit on the spot.

In fact, wherever there were white colonials – from Australia to Cape
Colony – the protests rained down.

Now would have been a good time for Britain to have drawn the
line. They did ... the color line.

Authorities quickly backed down, and let the executions take

place.¹

What followed was what you might expect.

Zulus rose up in rebellion.

Maybe half a dozen white men were killed.

No women, no kids.

But the British government's hands were tied.

All they could do was watch, as Natal's white volunteers
killed their way back to law and order.

3000 or more Zulus were shot down.

They were flushed out of the jungles, hunted like
animals.

The revolt's leader, a small time tribal
chief named Bambata was killed
and an army doctor cut off his head.

Plenty of thousand more zulus got a taste of the lash – or a
bellyful.

Across the veldt, you could see the smoke from Zulu villages
put to the torch.

¹ Thomas Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa: White Man's Conquest of the Dark Continent from 1876 to 1912* (New York: Random House, 1991), 648.

Their kraals were looted, their cattle taken.

Those that lived to fight another day lived to starve another day,
too.²

To top it all off, the Natal government arrested the son and heir of the
great Zulu chieftain from a quarter-century before.

He couldn't be charged with rebellion. He hadn't been part of the
uprisings.

He had stayed home, tended his cattle, minded his own business.

So he was arrested on 23 charges of high treason.

Witnesses, rubber-hosed into confessing things they'd never
known before – by methods that would have done credit
to Joe Stalin – saved their lives by swearing against
Dinizulu.

He got the fairest trial that any kangaroo court ever gave ...
even a lawyer paid for by the Prime Minister.

But the fix was in, and he was sent to jail.³

That was all Natal really needed; now they could appoint a new
King of the Zulus, who would do everything asked of him.

²Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa*, 648-49.

³ Thomas Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa*; 649-50.

Loaded Lugard

When Goldie sold out, he handed over 300,000 square miles and 24 million people to the Empire.

Most of it was in the plains north of the forests and oil palms.

It wasn't a land that could pay for itself.

The Niger Company hadn't had the means to control more than a tenth of the land – a small strip along the Niger and Benue and a few small Muslim states.

Slavery continued to thrive.

Nobody paid taxes.⁴

Northern Nigeria, as it became, was a paper province.

The government had about 100 civilian employees in 1901 and about 3000 black soldiers to bolster it.

That was where Lugard came in.

He crushed it into shape.

The Fulani states of the north, the Muslim emirates ... they had to be smashed, so that there was just one law, and that the law that came out of Lagos.

⁴ Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa*, 650.

This was kid's play – Maxim guns against spears and swords ...

Field-guns against gates made of cowhide and crenelated
towers made of mud.

Total losses in one campaign: one British soldier.

And among the enemy? Some 1,200 in a single day.

Machine guns aren't picky in who they kill.⁵

What if "Mamma" in London told him not to go off on punitive
expeditions butchering Fulani, to make them behave?

Lugard already had his army, and it was sinful to waste it.

Go to the village of Satiru, up in the northwestern end of
Nigeria.

Not much to it. Not much except a riot, where
British civil officers on the spot got hacked
or stabbed to death with hoes and axes.

Need a lesson, they do!

So Lugard sent his men on the double to wipe out the whole town.
Women and kids included.

Kill the guilty and innocent alike; God would know his own.

⁵ Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa*, 651.

What could peasants with hoes do against rifles and Maxim guns? They were mowed down where they stood.

Two thousand died there – not one of them on the British side.

Townpeople who survived were taken prisoner and their heads taken off, to put on spikes.

The village was then leveled so that nothing on the ground could show that a town had ever lived there.

And a friendly Sultan laid a curse on anyone who tried to rebuild Satiru.⁶

Lugard wasn't booted out for that.

He did something much more despicable.

He asked for the right to govern northern Nigeria without living there.

London was better for his wife's health.

Could he set up shop there?

When the British government said no, he quit as governor.

A year later, the authorities made him governor of Hong Kong.

It wasn't the end of the old empire-builder.

⁶ Thomas Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa: White Man's Conquest of the Dark Continent from 1876 to 1912* (New York: Random House, 1991), 651-52.

He would live till 1945, the last of the proconsuls.

And an Elder Statesman and adviser in the Colonial Service.⁷

Making The White Australia Policy

It's one token of the changing mood at turn of the century that some of the first legislation on the new Dominion of Australia's books was to put dark-skins in their place ... and make sure that the place was somewhere else than Australia.

Immigration Restriction Act –

To keep out all colored persons

Pacific Island Laborers' Act

To deport all indentured Melanesian workers from the sugar plantations of Melanesia.

Most of them worked in Queensland.

⁷ Thomas Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa*, 653.

They worked cheap; in fact, pretty close to slave labor.

So not only would they be sent home, and no new ones put in;

the sugar growers would get a special bounty, if their sugar was harvested by white people only.⁸

Other laws said that the only coastal shipping firms that could have mail contracts were ones with white labor only

And as the welfare legislation went on the books, the Aborigines were quite specifically shut out of them.

All of this wasn't the embarrassment to Whitehall that it should have been.

After all, the Chinese had been shut out of the different provinces for years.

Shutting out the Queen's own subjects in India, now ... that was a pricklier action.

⁸ R. M. Younger, *Australia and the Australians: A New Concise History* (New York: Humanities Press, 1970), 435-36.

But the Colonial Secretary, Joe Chamberlain, actually suggested the perfect loophole:

- keeping out people because of their race or colour would be offensive and unjust
- but you could insist that they be able to make the application to enter in the English language, and write and sign it themselves.

And that was how the ban worked.

Anyone wanting into Australia would be sat down.

An examining officer would ask him to write down what he was dictated, in any European language the examiner wanted.

**So... you want into Australia, is that it?
Oh, yes, Sahib.**

Right, then. Sit down and write the following letter in Magyar.....

[oh, you think this is a joke, right? Here's several REAL examples.

Item: White Englishwoman of dubious character, Mrs. Mary Frear
Authorities didn't want to let her in.

She was told to translate a passage read to her in *Italian*.
(Mrs. Frear put her hands over her ears, and insisted the test was invalid, because she could not hear it.

The judge didn't buy it).

Item: a Czech political refugee was sat down and told to take his test in *Gaelic*.

He failed it. But he went to court, arguing that Gaelic wasn't a language. The court agreed.

He got another test. This time it was in *Portuguese*.

He failed it.]⁹

Australia didn't stand alone.

The same kind of immigration laws went into effect in
New Zealand

Canada

South Africa.

In British Columbia, they sang:

This the voice of the West and it speaks to the world:
The rights that our Fathers have given
We'll hold by right and maintain by might,
Till the foe is backward driven.

⁹ The refugee's name was Egon Kisch. See John Greenway, *The Last Frontier* (London: Davis -Poynter, 1972), 282.

We welcome as brothers all white men still,
 But the shifty yellow race,
 Whose word is vain, who oppress the weak,
 Must find another place.

Then let us stand united all
 And show our father's might,
 That won the home we call our own,
 For white man's land we fight.
 To oriental grasp and greed
 We'll surrender, no, never.
 Our watchword be, "God save the king."
 White Canada forever!¹⁰

Pigtail politics, 1903-1906

South Africa, 1902-1910

We ought to think about what might have been in South Africa.

What if England had chosen to protect the black African natives?

It could have happened. And they did have grounds.

Because it was black Africans who helped England win the Boer War

¹⁰ Khushwant Singh, **A History of the Sikhs, Volume 2: 1839-1964** (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 169.

Not in arms, perhaps.

But there were plenty of other ways.

Remember, tens of thousands of them were tenant farmers
and hired laborers working for the Boer landowners.

We think of the Boers as plucky homesteaders fending off
the British threat.

Some were.

But many more were like the Southern planters.

They were landlords with vast domains
that black labor worked.

Given the chance in wartime, those tenants spied on their
masters and helped hunt them down, so that they could
be captured and herded into camps.

They took back some of the land taken from them.

They took tens of thousands of head of cattle that the
Boers had, and made them their own.

And when they captured Boers, they took their guns.

Maybe 50,000 muskets and rifles came into their hands
in wartime.

When the war ended, they had more land, more cattle, more of a chance
at a fair chance in life than they'd had in a generation, in
the Transvaal.

And they had the guns to back it up.

All Britain needed to do was say, "Okay! New deal!
Renters get a holiday from the rent they owe for the war years.

All the labor contracts are cancelled.

Black Africans can work out new terms with the Boers."

But the price of peace for Britain was to put the kaffirs in their place.

They were disarmed.

They were evicted.

The old contracts were enforced.¹¹

They were expendable; and not just politically – humanly, too.

What was to be done about this miscarriage of justice?

Liberal Ministers had the perfect solution: let there be one South Africa colony, not

¹¹ All of which is grist for Jeremy Krikler, "Agrarian class struggle and the South African War," **Social History**, 14 (May 1989): 151-76. The details are tremendous and compelling, but the analysis – that tries to see it without thinking about race at all, as a landless proletariat that has class consciousness, but doesn't know that it has class consciousness – is like a scholarly back-flip to dodge out of the way of the obvious.

four.

- Natal was the worst, for black people.
- Cape Colony was better.

Put them together, and you'd have a much fairer racial policy.

- let this one dominion of South Africa run things as it pleased.

Then none of the blame would fall on Britain.
Boer and English-speaker would get along together.

It wouldn't be a country; more like a federation –

the way the EU is.
four countries independent of each other in some things,
working together in a lot more.

Clever plans like these pile defeat on disgrace.

The four colonies did call a convention, and wrote up a draft constitution.

What they made was no federation. It was a union.

That meant that Transvaal and the Boers would run the show all across
South Africa.

And the price for their cooperation was the color bar.

Cape Colony let blacks with property vote.
One in seven was African.

Blacks couldn't vote at all in Orange Free State or Transvaal.
Maybe a handful kept the vote in Natal.

And the new Union Parliament could take the vote away
from blacks in the Cape Colony by a two-thirds
vote.

What was Britain to do?

All four colonies voted for the new constitution.

Britain had talked high and mighty about self-government.

Was it going to say no, now that the deal didn't suit them?

Britain had wanted to bring white people, English and Afrikaan, together
as friends. Now they were speaking with one voice.

Was the Mother Country going to kick over the milk-pail now?

Two delegations tried to sway the government's mind.

One represented a million white South Africans

The other represented nine or ten million black and brown South Africans.¹²

It was, really, no contest at all.

¹² Thomas Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa*, 666-667.

Parliament put through the South Africa bill.

The Union came into being in 1910.

And at the head of it – a territory three times the size of the republics he had fought to defend – was one of the bitter-ender Boer generals,

Louis Botha.

What happened in South Africa, though, was a faint omen of what was coming.

In 1906, the government issued the “Asiatic Law Amendment Ordinance.”
– all Indians over 8 years old must be fingerprinted.

They would get certificates of registration.

These, they must carry with them at all times.

They must give them over when ordered.

– any Indian who didn’t allow himself to be fingerprinted could no longer claim residence in the Transvaal.

The government could fine him –

jail him –

deport him.

– any Indian who didn’t produce the certificate could be arrested.

– any cop could enter any Indian house and demand to see the warrant.

No need for search warrants.

– any Indian coming to a government office to ask for anything or about anything would have to show the certificate to prove he really was a resident.

No government official needed to give him a license for trading, or to own a bike, or even listen to him make a complaint, until that registration certification was produced.

Now, keep in mind that till now, only ONE group got fingerprinted: criminals.

It was a deliberate attempt to humiliate some 15,000 Indians in the Transvaal.

If it passed there, every other South African government would do the same thing.¹³

The Indians were angry, and they needed a leader.

They got one, a lawyer and a genuine decorated war hero from the Boer War, Mohandas Gandhi.

Gandhi was a remarkable example of what Empire could do and could not do to realize the family of man.

He was born to the purple. His father was a hereditary prime minister

¹³ Robert Payne, *The Life and Death of Mahatma Gandhi* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1969), 161-62.

in a little state on the western coasts of India.

It wasn't all that high a caste, religiously – the caste of shopkeepers and petty tradesmen.

At thirteen, he married, and discovered the joys of sex.

He was in the middle of those joys when the word came of his father's death.

From then on, sex pretty much began to vanish from his temperament.¹⁴

And so did India. He was sent to England to study law.

His father's death meant that the princely state would need another Gandhi as its prime minister.

¹⁴ Larry Collins and Dominique LaPierre, *Freedom At Midnight*, 54.

The more training he got, the better.¹⁵

London had been a dismaying experience for a shy young man,
the first in his family ever to leave India.

Even getting out a full sentence was next to impossible.

And he was a shrimp, in cheap, badly-cut Indian clothes,
among the gentlemen of the Inns of Court.

Small and leaving no impression at all, he was often
mistaken for an errand boy by other students.

So Gandhi tried to fit in, and become utterly English....

silk top hat

silver tipped walking stick

white gloves

patent-leather boots

evening suit.

Plus hair lotion to smooth his hair down against his head.

For hours, he would stare into the mirror, to see that his looks were just
so, and the english way to tie a tie.

He bought a violin.

He took dancing lessons.

¹⁵ Larry Collins and Dominique LaPierre, *Freedom At Midnight*, 54-55.

He hired a tutor to teach him French.

He learned elocution from a teacher.

None of it did the slightest good.

The violin squeaked and screamed.

He danced with at least two left feet, if not more.

French, he never got the hang of.

And shy he stayed, elocution lessons or no.

And when he tried going to a house of prostitution, he never
made it further than the parlor before panicking.¹⁶

There was no becoming English, really. So Gandhi went back to being an
Indian, and studying the law; he passed and went back to India.

But there were no clients. Tongue-tied lawyers don't find all that
many customers.

A failure, he found only one group that wanted his services: his family.

They had relatives with legal tangles in South Africa.

They sent him there for a few months.

He stayed for over twenty years.

South Africa was a bitter learning experience.

¹⁶ Larry Collins and Dominique LaPierre, *Freedom At Midnight*, 55.

The very first week, when he was riding in a first-class car on the train to Pretoria, the conductor took one look at his dark skin and ordered him to move to the baggage car.

What? On a first-class ticket? Gandhi protested.

At the next stop, a cop came on board, threw him off, and threw his bags off, too.

It was a dark, cold night.

Gandhi had an overcoat in his luggage, but the bag was locked, and the station master had it, and Gandhi was too shy to ask him for it.

After a shivering night, he may not have got a wink of sleep.

But he had awoken.

There would be no more accepting wrongs done to him.¹⁷

Within a week, the shy lawyer was making speeches, telling the Indians to stand up for their rights.

To do it, they would need to know the English language –
the language of their oppressor.

So Gandhi began classes in English grammar.

He began fighting, and kept fighting.

¹⁷ Larry Collins and Dominique LaPierre, *Freedom At Midnight*, 56.

South African authorities gave way. They agreed that Indian or not,
a first-class ticket entitled a traveler to first-class service.

In time, he became the best and most effective lawyer in the Indian
community, and one of the best in the Cape Colony.

He was earning 5000 pounds a year – no mean sum.

That made him one of the rich elite of South Africa, white
and coloured.

In the Boer War, he headed an ambulance corps for the British.

The shy lawyer who could get no words out and got no cases was far in
the past by 1906.

He had studied the works of Leo Tolstoy and John Ruskin and
Henry David Thoreau.

He had looked into the sacred texts of his faith, and of the Bible.

Out of this came a philosophy of life – the curbing of all desires

(He gave up sex completely).

Restraint in emotion – in life – and diet and speech.

An ability to control the anger in oneself.

But this was not the doctrine of the powerless, but of the powerful.

There must be a way to resist wrong.

It would not be the way of the Old Testament, but of the New.

An eye for an eye would lead to a world of the blind.

Killing a man doesn't change his heart or soul.

Violence can never drive the violence and hatred from the oppressor.¹⁸

But as Thoreau had argued, a person had a moral duty not to make peace with a wrong law, nor swear allegiance to a tyrannical government.

This didn't mean guns and bullets – not for Thoreau.

It meant *civil disobedience*.

No law that is wrong should be obeyed.

There should be no violence, no fuss – but no bowing.

A contest was held, to think of a term for this policy.

The winner was Satyagraha – “firmness for truth.”¹⁹

¹⁸ Larry Collins and Dominique LaPierre, *Freedom At Midnight*, 58-59.

¹⁹ Actually, it was Sadagraha, “firmness in a good cause.” But Gandhi fiddled with it to make the final form. The original suggestion came from Maganlal Gandhi. Its simplest expression was Gandhi's own: “the conquest of the adversary by suffering in one's own person.” Robert Payne, *The Life and Death of Mahatma Gandhi*, 164.

Gandhi knew that before it could be law, the measure needed approval in London. He went, and got plenty of sympathetic hearings from people at the very top.

Lord Elgin, the Colonial Secretary, refused to assent to the law.²⁰

It seemed too good to be true – and was. The Secretary spoke in November.

But on January 1, 1907, less than two months later, Transvaal got self-government.

Now they could pass the same law, or an even worse one, and not have London's say-so.

By the end of March, the law had passed.

²⁰ Robert Payne, *The Life and Death of Mahatma Gandhi*, 165-69. One of the few people who offered constructive criticism – or just plain criticism – was the Undersecretary for Colonial Affairs. He pointed out that in a few weeks, Transvaal would have complete power to make any law it wanted. Knock this one down, and how could Britain keep a worse one from being drafted? Gandhi answered that no law *could* be worse, and let the future turn out as it would. The Undersecretary was Winston Churchill; he would never meet Gandhi again.

And the King had given his assent.

That should have been the end of things; it was the beginning.

As registration began, Indians picketed the roads to the registration offices, ordering their countrymen to go home.

They handed out handbills and pamphlets attacking registration.

Every Indian who registered got his or her name printed in the Indian newspaper, under the heading, "Blacklegs."²¹

The pickets would not threaten or bully or harm anyone.

They would mostly be kids, 12 to 18.

If arrested, they should go along quietly.

But there was a new, militant tone here, as posters cried out:

**Loyalty to the King demands loyalty
to the King of Kings.**

²¹ Robert Payne, *The Life and Death of Mahatma Gandhi*, 171.

Indians, be free!

Anyone not registered by July 31st could be ordered to leave the Transvaal.

But the Indians should resist – they should not stay put.

If they did that, under the law, they **WOULD** stay;
because the penalty for resisting was a month in jail.

Let the cops arrest the Indians! There were so many, the jails would overflow.

The Government would have to back down.

It would have to, because out of the thousands on thousands of Indians, only 500 registered.

The Government gave them an extra five months.

Eleven more registered.

Gandhi went to prison, and worked two hours a day as a barber, cropping the hair of other Indians being sent off to jail – which was a lot of them.

What followed would be eight years of struggle, against law after law to burden still further the Indians in south Africa.

Transvaal closed its borders to any Indian immigrant entirely.

There came the day in 1913 when Gandhi would lead two thousand men, women and kids on a march to those borders.

They would all be arrested, they knew.

That was what they intended.

There were floggings and jailings and great cruelties.

But the movement endured, survived, and in the end came close to winning.²²

Yet in the end, General Smuts gave way.

– illiterate Indians would give their fingerprints, literate ones need only sign their names

– Indian marriages would be recognized

– they were allowed to come into the Union of South Africa.

Gandhi had won a partial victory. With that, his work was done.

The next we would hear from him would be in India itself.

²² Larry Collins and Dominique LaPierre, *Freedom At Midnight*, 59.

But as a token of good will, he made a pair of sandals, and gave them to General Smuts.

The General wore them for the next 25 years.

He gave them back to Gandhi in 1939, as a birthday present.²³

²³ Robert Payne, *The Life and Death of Mahatma Gandhi*, 271-72. That doesn't mean that the two men liked each other much.