

1. The first white settlement in South Africa occurred on the Cape under the control of the Dutch East India company. The foothold established by Jan van Riebeck following his arrival with three ships on 6th April 1652 was usually taken in Afrikaner accounts to be the start of the 'history' of South Africa. It is a version that ignored the presence there of the hunter-gatherer Koi-San, and the variety of Bantu-speaking peoples who practiced both agriculture and cattle-grazing.

2. Cattle grazing among Bantu peoples was hugely important since cattle provided for most needs including clothing and food and were used in religious sacrifices. Cattle were also and a key form of 'capital' used in forging alliances - particularly in the form of transferable 'bridewealth' when women married and left the family home. The more cattle owned the greater a person's status.

2. The Bantu-speaking tribes included the Venda; Shona, Xhosa, and the Herero. In these groups power lay with royal families or clans. Chiefs enjoyed considerable power but it was not unlimited and succession was sometimes the result of collective discussion within the clan. Day-to-day decision-making rested with the chief and his advisers, but more serious matters might be debated in wider-council.

3. Whereas the Koi had only had relatively small and dispersed populations and were only able ever to stage raids against the ever-expanding white population reaching out for more land from the Cape, it was a different story with the Xhosa with whom early Dutch settlers often had to live in very close proximity and with whom they frequently formed alliances. A number of the Dutch even set themselves as mini-chiefs in their own right, forging agreements with Xhosa tribes to help them in their struggles with local white adversaries. Far from not being able to mix - the early settlers and local Xhosa proved every bit as adaptable and co-operative as they needed to be to survive in a harsh and un-policed environment.

4. The Eastern Frontier of the Cape colony was clearly a fascinating and dangerous place in the late 18th Century - a far more uncomfortably complex world than that envisaged by Miss Lukid. Missing from her narrative of heroic struggle against 'savage natives' were incidents like the behaviour of Adriaan van Jaarsveld who in an effort to 'encourage' the Xhosa to retire to lands behind the Fish River in 1780 took to the field with an armed 'commando' - or raiding party. In July 1781 he managed to concentrate a group of Xhosa by scattering seemingly discarded tobacco over an area of open ground. When the local Xhosa gathered to pick it up, van Jaarsveld's men opened fire on them from concealed positions, killing many. This was followed by the theft of their cattle. Conflict would continue for many years, with neither the Xhosa or the white authorities being able to marshal large enough forces to drive the other away once and for all, Meanwhile land pressures were growing all the time as more settlers arrived.

5. The relationships between black and white were further complicated by the work of English-speaking Christian missionaries who both sought to convert the native peoples they encountered but also encourage them to become more European in their ways of life - becoming farmers to rival those white ones already well established in the frontier areas. Even worse, from the white settlers' point of view, these missionaries would sometimes take up the cause of black people against the worst forms of abuse and exploitation. On both fronts the missionary work threatened to further blur the distinctions between black and white and also reduced the black labour pool that white farmers relied upon to keep things going on their land.

6. During its wars with revolutionary and then Napoleonic France, Britain took control (after 1806) of the Cape colony. British interference was resented by many of the Dutch settlers, and in particular the imposition of controls over their importation of slaves (after 1807) and then the general outlawing of slave ownership after 1833. Possibly worst of all was Ordinance Number 50 of 1828 which granted equal status before the law to all races on the Cape. It was a move that deeply shook things up among those established white communities that regarded black-inferiority as an absolute 'given'. Meanwhile, the white land grab continued - especially across the Orange River which brought the settlers into conflict with the Griqua people. Now competing for land were not just descendents of the original Dutch settlers but also large numbers of English-speaking new-arrivals.

7. The 19th Century witnessed two significant mass migrations only one of which, one suspects, would merit much emphasis in Miss Lukid's class. In 1835 the Great Trek was the Boers voting with their feet, attempting to move beyond British authority into the territories to the east. In this way they hoped to restore their own forms of self-government and social structure, based upon rigid racial distinction and inequality. The continuing sometimes bloody determination of the Xhosa to hold onto their lands in the Cape, forced the British authorities to negotiate with them and offer them guarantees which further infuriated the Boers who rejected any such compromises with the black peoples of Southern Africa. The other significant migrations were those undertaken roughly from the north to the south and from the east to the west of Southern Africa by a variety of tribes with cultures tied to cattle and grazing. Pity the poor Koi-San – the hunter-gatherer people of this part of the continent who increasingly found themselves squashed between two powerful expansionist groups – the whites and the various African tribes on the move.

8. The Boer's were further encouraged to up sticks by the perceived emptiness of large areas of fertile land to the east. This phenomenon was not due to a lack of black tribes with claims to the land, but to the grim years of the *mfecane* or 'unlimited warfare' between tribes that had been depopulating lands that would otherwise have been full of people when the Boers arrived. The *mfecane* had a number of origins including a recent emergence of

powerful chieftans eager to conquer the tribes around them. The presence of European traders on the coast eager for ivory added fuel to the disorder.

9. One of the most expansionist peoples to emerge at this time were the Zulu, united behind their leader Shaka, who developed a new form of warfare, based upon tightly knit groups of men behind shields and the use of short stabbing-spears. It was a kind of warfare made possible by another general shift occurring across numbers of tribes replacing young men's initiation ceremonies with military service – a development that made more people available to leaders like Shaka and the new (devastating) methods of warfare.

10. Shaka was eventually killed by Dingane and it was under his leadership that the Zulu would offer fierce resistance to the arriving Boers. Dingane is associated mainly with the tricking and killing of one of the Treker commanders Piet Retief (the source of the name of the town nearest to the Laing's home). On the pretext of granting Retief ownership of a large region of land (the Tugela-Umzimvubu), Zingane managed to capture and massacre Retief's 100-strong group during a celebratory meal. It was a treacherous act but one that matched similar dirty tricks carried out by other Treker groups. Dingane was also well aware that while white people might arrive at first in small numbers, a broader invasion was sure to follow.

11. Despite the situation being very precarious for the Trekers, they had a huge advantage in guns and horses that enabled them to fight a kind of hit and run warfare with the Zulu and other tribes against which they could offer little resistance. The Boer's tactic of pulling their wagons into a circle and thus creating a defensive position when attacked – a laager – also meant that the kind of full-frontal, close-knit attacks that Shaka had developed proved absolutely disastrous – especially in the face of the Boer's accurate rifle fire.

12. On the 15th December, 1838, a Boer commando managed to destroy the Zulu army sent against them at the Battle of Blood River. It was utterly decisive, forcing Dingane to flee his lands and leaving the way open for the Boers to claim the lands granted to Piet Retief. Further lands would soon fall too, when Zulu once loyal to Dingane switched sides and asked the Boers for help in rebelling against their former leader. With the Zulu nation in (temporary) disarray the way was clear for the Boers to establish their perfect state based on two republics – the Orange Free State and the Transvaal.

Other sources of information:

A Short History of South Africa

<http://www.southafrica.info/about/history/history.htm>

Wikipedia – history of South Africa

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_South_Africa

South African History – includes excellent timelines

<http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/index/menu.htm>