

*Editor's note. This essay is a sample of those submitted for consideration. Written by a 21 year-old student studying geography at university, it was not one of the prize winners.*

The recent history of South Africa has been one marked by considerable turmoil, invasion, feuding and oppression, not only between the country's black and white population, such as caused by the Anglo Zulu War of 1879, but also between its white population as witnessed in the two Boer Wars of 1880 and 1900.

In the space of 130 years, this vast, beautiful and relatively under-populated country has witnessed three terrible wars that inflicted thousands of deaths of soldiers, warriors and civilians. Worse, the aftermath of these wars has divided the country's population. Following the Anglo Zulu War, an unnecessary invasion by well equipped British troops against the Zulu nation, the British continued the misery by dividing the country ruthlessly, allocating the best farmland to European farmers and exiling the Zulu leader, King Cetshwayo. After such long term ill-treatment, the possibility of reconciliation would appear almost impossible.

The damage to South Africa continued with the two Boer Wars. The British were now fighting the local Boer farmers who combined their resources and skills to resist British domination of their affairs. Both sides were well armed and brought large armies into the field, though both sides were reluctant to involve the black native population. The effect of the bitter war caused serious disruption and starvation to the native population already struggling to survive in harsh conditions exacerbated by famine, heat and drought. Once again, following such brutal fighting and with both sides on such bitter terms, reconciliation would not appear to be an option.

The situation was made worse for the majority black population with the dawn of *Apartheid* in 1948. This policy of repression divided blacks and whites even further and was ruthlessly enforced until 1994. So, by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, what with the ravages of warfare, division and repression, the question of any meaningful reconciliation would appear a probable impossibility.

Yet, to the astonishment of the rest of the world, reconciliation has featured most strongly across the whole South African nation. The change truly began with the abolition of *Apartheid* but this still left a nation of mixed races with long memories of bitterness. The following Truth Commission chaired by Bishop Desmond Tutu enabled those who participated in, or who had knowledge of wrongdoing, to acknowledge their crimes or omissions in exchange for forgiveness, a very simple but painful process for all involved, but it was, nevertheless, liberating for the nation. Statesmanship also played a very powerful role, especially the part played by the very charismatic Nelson Mandela who embarked on a worldwide mission to encourage reconciliation and support for his, effectively, new nation.

One of the most significant new missions that South Africa embarked upon was the encouragement of tourism, not only to welcome overseas tourists to visit and enjoy the wonderful country with its new 'rainbow' people, but to visit the battlefields from the

wars that had ravaged the country and killed so many on all sides. Such tourism has encouraged reconciliation because it brings all sides together for a common purpose, to enable everyone involved to empathise and understand that, at the time, those involved often did so in the honest belief that they were doing what was right. Such tourism enables and encourages both overseas and home tourists to visit the sights, enjoy the country and meet the peoples in an exciting but safe environment.

Britain has much to answer for by starting the Anglo Zulu War and for then fighting the two Boer Wars, and strangely, British visitors have flocked to South Africa in their thousands to visit these poignant battlefields, many of which are in beautiful and lonely locations. For the British, these visits were initially seen as a means of paying homage or respect to their own dead. It spawned an internal industry, fuelled by the films *Zulu* and *Zulu Dawn*, of visiting these remarkable battlefields and then meeting the local people. It is no surprise that the film *Zulu* was recently voted the most popular film by the British Army and the film is invariably shown on British television every Christmas and Easter. It is this meeting of peoples and minds that, in my view, has hastened the act of reconciliation. Today, British visitors are welcomed with much warmth in South Africa, a warmth that is strengthened when they visit the battlefields. The attitude of Boer descendants of those who suffered the concentration camps has been difficult to overcome but, today, visitors to those areas which suffered so severely are made welcome, with battlefield lodges offering friendly hospitality.

Finally, the story continues to be told, of warfare and battles past, which now serve to unite people in friendship and understanding instead of dividing them. Lecturers from South Africa are made welcome in the United Kingdom and speak to packed audiences across the county while British tour companies busily send tourists to the battlefields to witness for themselves the magnificence of the country and the warmth of its people, with some history thrown in. Reconciliation in South Africa has been a success and an example to the world.