

Sioux/Zulu – the Battle for Identity in the Age of Progress

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A COMPARATIVE history must admit many factors that show that the battles of Isandlwana and The Little Big Horn are not strictly comparable – a mounted warrior race in one hemisphere and an *impi* of foot soldiers in another already define a singular difference. But the Natal conflict of 1879 and the North American conflict of 1877 have more than chronological proximity to warrant our sleuthing of a common agenda, a similarity in the white pressure that brought the two warrior nations to arms. Herbert Spencer’s popularisation of Darwin or, in the American case, the notion (first promulgated in 1854) that white America must fulfil its “manifest destiny” touched a common chord, even in audiences that did not know each

other and never thought of themselves as having a common project.

In America the Washington government had been fighting, pacifying, cajoling and compromising with indigenous tribes ever since the Republic was born. As the 19th century wore on, however, it became obvious that the goalposts were shifting and that the world was seeing one of the largest human migrations that had ever occurred. It also became obvious that the drive to head west put the very existence of the Native Americans into jeopardy. By the time of the battle of Little Big Horn an independent Indian population numbered only some 10% of the number of frontiersmen that had thronged to the west (even when the US had barely extended its official frontiers from colo-

nial times). Population counts can give an illusion of size, however. Even if the migrant population was a million by the end of the 1870s, it was still sparse in American terms. The wagon trains that crossed the Rockies were intermittent and fragile – especially so when fierce Indian tribesmen equated the mere sight of them with the dwindling resource of buffalo. The buffalo grazed a different route from the east–west trails of the settlers, and were counted on for the south–north drive that was a key factor in American Indian subsistence.

Zulu

Nineteenth-century expansion redrew the maps with immensely diverse peoples, made up of small factions and divided sovereignties – diversity such as to invite (to get closer to our story) the unifying capacity of a dominant regional power – in our narrative, the US Federal government, on the one hand, and Her Majesty’s imperial emissaries on the other. It was easy, in this climate, to embody racial supremacy without ever having to name it – the “white man’s burden” was a phrase that sufficiently justified the amorality of westward expansion or, in Africa, the project to paint the map red, and thus ensure the advance of civilisation. Hence the agenda for confederation inaugurated by the fourth Earl of Carnarvon, and his enlistment of Sir Bartle Frere, whose successes in Canada and India seemed to indicate him as best suited for the High Commissionership in South Africa. Here Frere could perform the same feat of administrative streamlining that he had demonstrated in India and Canada, and which Carnarvon called confederation.

In turn, Frere would find in Natal a henchman who seemed to be an ideal

exponent of Carnarvon’s programme. Theophilus Shepstone had made a name for himself, in the late 1850s and 60s, for his policy of parcelling lands in locations, and thus accommodating many of the refugee Zulus who had come sweeping back into Natal in the wake of the Shakan wars. Shepstone’s plan saw this somewhat dispersed and fugitive population so well distributed amongst the labour-hungry settlers from Britain as to resolve the problems of farm-labour and tenancy at a stroke. It would do Shepstone no justice to ignore the benign intention that lay behind his Native Policy, especially as the programme he initiated was extraordinarily durable – in some details, in fact, influential to this day. As Laband sums it up:

Basic to it was an attempt by officials ... to protect the African population from the settlers who wished to exploit them as cheap labour. Lack of funds meant, however, that the locations were never turned ... into active agencies of western civilisation, with its attendant mechanical and agricultural skills. Instead they remained places where Africans could continue to lead their own lives away from the land thrown open to white farmers. This being the case, Shepstone improvised an expedient system of indirect rule to run the locations. He was conscious of the dangers inherent in a precipitate transition from an African to a colonial administration, and believed that hereditary chiefs should be left with a modicum of their former powers¹

Salvation by benign administration sounds good at first sight, but it only really suits migrant peoples who are searching for a homeland. It does not suit at all a race of warriors and hunters who have staked out their territory in a long history of negotiation and conquest. Shepstone’s reversion to crown

rule (for that is what the simplification of confederation really amounted to) made some sense for unsettled or fugitive peoples, but what we might call the wisdom of the tribe might speculate that rule from the top – especially when the top is as far removed as London or Washington – meant the emasculation of councils and interpretations that were the mainstay of traditional belief.

But the two-dimensional political scheme enshrined in Shepstone's approach was not apparent to the purveyors of confederation. Frere was delighted when he learned, soon after his arrival in the Cape in 1877, that the Boers in the Transvaal seemed to beg for a superior administrator to step in – almost for salvation! As Shepstone put the case:

Nothing but annexation ... can save the state. All the thinking and intelligent people know this, and will be thankful to be delivered from the thralldom of petty factions by which they are perpetually kept in a state of excitement and unrest²

Confederation, it seems, was always welcomed at first. Only when the procedural consequences were registered did colonists with any constitutional background begin to protest. What else was Frere's re-drawing of the map, on the simplistic model of the new Canadian provinces, but a return to Crown Colony rule? Confederation seemed to discount the parliamentary experience that a colony like the Cape had long since acquired.

Frere arrived as High Commissioner for South Africa in March 1877. It staggers the historian to this day how much damage he did between then and the time of his hurried recall in 1880! By May 1878, in the name of confederation, he had reduced the Cape parliament to

a non-elective body. Before a Molteno or a Merriman had time to draw breath, Frere, believing (along with Carnarvon) that the continued existence of independent African states posed the threat of a "general and simultaneous rising of Kaffirdom against white civilisation"³ had, by early 1879, brought the Xhosa states to heel. More than that, he had, by that date, a general in the field with three large columns of troops on the march to Zululand.

Sioux

To cross now to the United States, we must note how many popular histories of the US derive moralistic profit from the simple paradigm where the white man enters east, and the red man exits west. It must be emphasised that, especially after a Civil War fought on liberationist principles, there was a considerable liberal empathy with the Indian predicament. In this context, our comparative history turns on one word, the word "reservation". The reservations, which were conceived with a benign intention, could nevertheless, become (as with Shepstone's "locations") a threat to cultural identity, one that would be especially palpable in major warrior races like the Sioux or the Zulu. The unspoken moral crux was that the reservations represented, in America, the white man's compensation for the fact his westward migration had displaced Native Americans from any sense of homeland. Put locations or reservations into the benign language of protection and we can see why Frere's confederation scheme might have an effect not dissimilar from the American version.

Wrote the US Secretary of the Interior in 1866:

It has been the settled policy of the government to establish the various tribes upon suitable reservations and there protect and subsist them until they can be taught to cultivate the soil and sustain themselves⁴

The fact that the tribes in question might have been sustaining themselves for centuries eludes the mindset for which only the type “farmer” is worthy of the manifest destiny of westward expansion. By this criterion, reservations vie with locations in the Victorian vocabulary of benign intention. The Native Americans came to treat the reservations as a deeply ambiguous medicine for their woes. Notice how author Robert Utley, writing one of the classic texts on the subject in 1975, almost inadvertently sees the tribal subscription to the federal welfare programmes of the 1860s and 1870s, as a “fall”. The “good” Indians who subscribed to it were in a sense less admirable than the “bad” Indians who resisted it:

Almost all (tribes) had treaties with the US government and agencies at which they drew such issues of goods ... as were prescribed by treaty. Some tribes had fallen into virtually total dependence on the government ... Others, not yet dependent, visited their agency periodically. A few broke into friendly and hostile factions ... Finally, a small handful of tribes ... proudly disdained all association with whites. But even they had become accustomed to such useful items of white manufacture as firearms⁵

As we shall see, one of the last of the “disdaining” faction was the Sioux chief Sitting Bull. Not that the famous chief was hidebound by tradition! His horsemen were no mean handlers of the Winchester repeaters that they secretly gathered through the “agencies”.

In the late 1860s, the choice between reservation and non-reservation status was not yet a matter of coercion. But of course the intensification of the westward migration could not long delay a clash of interests. The Fetterman Incident of 1866 figures large in US frontier history as highlighting the almost inevitable collision between the axis of migration heading west, and the hunter’s trail heading north. Fetterman was an officer protecting the east-west route, policed by the US cavalry. This was the new Bozeman Trail, named after its chief surveyor, and which had several advantages over the old Oregon Trail, being more direct and better watered. It had major advantages, but, alas, it went plumb through an age-old buffalo trail that was a drove for the Indians, and an important resource. The US cavalry, believing that their mission was to protect the migratory route rather than the hunters’ trail, supervised the building of three forts along the lonelier reaches of the Bozeman path.

At first, there seemed to be every prospect that the Bozeman would be a peaceable trail, some of the officers even bringing their wives and children along to enjoy its finer scenery when it was opened. But the Oglala and Miniconjou Sioux they encountered had passed through a winter of near starvation, and friendliness to the soldiers was the obvious policy toward those who could hand out presents. But they soon got to hear that Chief Standing Elk of the Brule Sioux had a different message. “The fighting men ... have not yet come to Laramie (one of the three Bozeman forts) and you will have to fight them.”⁶ Even more eloquent was Red Cloud: “The Great Father sends us presents and wants us to sell him the road, but White Chief goes with soldiers to steal

the road before Indians say Yes or No ...”.⁷ In a sentence Red Cloud summed up the missing step in so much of white expansion in Victorian times; that Yes or No of the elders or tribal council that alone validated a policy. (As we shall see, this was the same omission that got Shepstone into hot water at Council Rock, when he tried to justify his fiddling with the Zululand border.)

Captain William Fetterman had the typical bragging demeanour of the new American (i.e. one who saw manifest destiny written all along the trail to the west). When he took his cavalry out from Fort Phil Kearney to protect a wood-cutting expedition, he was heard to boast that, with his 80 men, he could “ride through the entire Sioux Nation” in one brief encounter.⁸ One encounter was all he got – so thoroughly was he ambushed and his force wiped off the face of the earth!

But what happened next is in some ways more surprising than a sudden ambush. On the political front we now enter the “new” USA, and the sort of consciousness that had developed there after the Civil War. In traditional frontier morality, Fetterman’s fate would have been the signal for a vendetta, a charge by the cavalry to show who was boss on the western front. But the US administration of 1866 – and here we must include General Sherman of Civil War fame – found themselves caught in a new set of moral pressures, at once cognisant of the settlers moving west (who could not wait for vengeance to ensue) and the liberal voice of the New Republic – the east coast press, influential churchmen, the Quakers of Pennsylvania. So when the dashing young Civil War hero General Hancock vowed that “he intended to lead an army” to “whip” offenders “if

they tormented the travel routes”⁹, he did not realise how critically he was being scrutinised. He achieved the torching of 251 deserted lodges, and provoked such a howl of execration, both in Indian and white camps, as to more or less cut short his career (even General Sherman complaining of army “heavy-handedness”). This was certainly a new take on American relations with the Indians – claiming in effect that the migrant settlers were the real intruders, that they caused the shortage of buffalo, and that the agencies (offices that manned the reservations) should supply indigenous peoples with firearms to compensate for the shortfall. (Grumbled one cavalry officer: “They have been able to do perfectly well with bows and arrows for centuries ...”.¹⁰)

So persuasive was this voice that it achieved what pioneer America would never have thought possible. Red Cloud – who had visited the President and had a spokesman in Washington – was adamant that his people would never support the agencies, no matter how benign their intentions, if the forts on the Bozeman Trail were not abandoned. That route through the forests must be returned for exclusive Indian use, and the US cavalry who were supposed to protect it must be withdrawn. The result was the Medicine Lodge Treaty which embodied the principle of “concentration policy”. (It needs not much history to persuade us that the word “concentration” often arrives with a benign intention, but fails to live up to its promise.) The treaty seemed to promise Indian independence. As often with a confederation implication, it was hoped that the size of the land grant (ceding, in effect, most of Dakota) would resolve all counter-claims at the stroke of a pen.

... The notion was of two vast reservations ... on which all the roving tribes would be persuaded to gather ... Here they could be insulated from the kind of interracial contact that had infected them. No unauthorised whites would be admitted; government teachers would educate the young, seeds and agricultural implements would be furnished¹¹

(Later these two huge locations were amalgamated into The Great Sioux Reservation.)

But those who could read between the lines might well espy the large gestures of what, in another context, Frere would call confederation. The likes of Sitting Bull *could* read between the lines, and soon recognised that the “fundamental objective of government policy toward the Sioux was to lure them onto a reservation and subserve them to the apparatus of Indian administration”.¹²

There were blandishments of course – if you came to live on the Great Sioux Reservation (roughly South Dakota west of the Missouri) you were promised “free rations and other presents to those who would affiliate ...”. The lands that the Indians used to roam free, and whose extent was more defined by the migration of buffalo than any cartographic marker, now became “bad” and “good” according to administrative perception. Because “good” and “bad” now became a fairly arbitrary coinage, one could say that a new morality began to affect the judicial sense of space. By this treaty, the Indians relinquished all rights to territory outside the reservation. “Inside” and “outside” became the determinants of who was “hostile” and who was “friendly”. In addition the signatories promised to withdraw all opposition to railroads and military posts.

As Utley remarks, the programme called for a complete change of character, a personality transition that the apparent generosity of the land grant could not conceal. It was the sort of metamorphosis that the Zulu headmen in South Africa began to sniff in the Shepstone-inspired “coronation” of Cetshwayo in 1873. In America “nomadic warrior hunters were to be transformed into sedentary agriculturalists and inculcated with Anglo-Saxon values ...”.¹³ The result was the reverse of a moral uplift. The shrewdest practitioners of life “inside” or “outside” ceded territories passed “half their time at these agencies and half in the hostile camps ... often leaving their women, children and old people to be fed and cared for at the agency ... before joining the nomads in raids, then (coming) back to the agency to draw rations ...”.¹⁴

Meanwhile, before we bring too much sociological scepticism to bear on Grant’s peace plan, let us concede that the US troops endured “the unpalatable prescription” of abandoning and destroying the forts that had “cost a great deal of blood, toil and treasure”, and handing them over to Red Cloud’s “torch-bearing warriors ...”.¹⁵ Besides, Red Cloud himself showed some recognition of the size of the concession. After some prevarication, and keeping the liberal audience guessing to the last, Red Cloud eventually “came in” (the agency vocabulary for conversion and salvation) on 6 November, 1868.

Zulu

Shepstone seems to have had no doubts that the confederation policy he had introduced in Natal would be equally successful in the Transvaal, and that settlers in the Transvaal would welcome a



Cetshwayo ready for his reception by British royalty. There is a case for saying that the adulation accorded him by the extreme royalist Usuthu party deflected his attention from the actual state of things in the rank and file of his own people. (Photo from the mid 1880s)

Frere-type protection against a “general and simultaneous rising of Kaffirdom against white civilisation”. Frere had brought his confederation scheme with him from Canada and sought to spread it across the colonies of South Africa without stopping to question whether a brand new state in north America offered any sort of basis for a model. (One thinks of Red Cloud: “White Chief goes with soldiers to steal the road before Indians say Yes or No ...”) Hence a nice piece of drollery from a *Natal Witness* of the 1870s:

He (Carnarvon) thought it no harm to adopt this machinery (Canadian Confederation System) just as it stood, even down to the numbering

and arrangement of the sections ... and present it to the astonished South Africans ... It is as if your tailor should say – “Here is a coat; I did not make it, but I stole it ready-made out of a railway cloakroom. I don’t know whether you want a coat or not ... if it shall happen to be too long in the sleeves, or ridiculously short in the back, I may be able to shift a button a few inches”¹⁶

Where Shepstone’s ready-made coat became ridiculous to any South African wearer was when the confederation style failed to take the measure of long-term disputes or boundary squabbles. This was certainly noticed by the Molteno–Merriman axis in the Cape who, after welcoming Frere at first, soon came to realise how much of their birthright they must surrender for the High Commissioner to have his way. Even before Frere arrived on the scene, the new way of thinking was causing offence. At the height of his powers – when Shepstone “crowned” the new king of the Zulus – he failed to notice how his hastily-invented protocol did not convince a large segment of his audience. No doubt he saw himself as the wonderman who – backed by the Queen – could cure the Zulu king of some his less savoury excesses. It was all very well for Cetshwayo to be bemusedly acquiescent in Shepstone’s performance, but a different message came across to his senior councillors.

It indicates no demotion of the King’s sway in Zulu society to claim that there was no principle of “absolute” rule in this culture. In the words of one commentator:

Cetshwayo did not rule as an absolute monarch, his plans being sometimes thwarted by the chiefs of his council of state. Following the coronation

they continued to execute whom they pleased without reference to the king, which they considered their hereditary right¹⁷

If Cetshwayo really had been an absolute monarch, Zulu society would have been more susceptible to foreign influence, and an easier piece to deal with in the scheme that now included Boer and Briton, Sekhukuni and the Swazi. Shepstone would have more power in Zululand if he had the ear of the king “solus”, and not the king “in council”. He could then present Frere with a well-managed chequerboard of amenable pieces, on the model that the new High Commissioner brought to fruition in Canada.

But it was the Zulu council rather than the Zulu king who began to see the gaping contradictions in the confederal scheme. Shepstone could no longer pretend that such a scheme solved age-old boundary disputes, or even papered over cracks in the edifice. The attempt to present one face to the republicans in the Transvaal and then an identical one to the Zulus on their border, magnified the contradiction at stake. “Previously the British had chosen to see the Zulu viewpoint as a way of denying the Boers access to the sea, but the waters had now become muddied by these same Boers becoming British subjects”¹⁸

The crux came at a meeting on a flat-topped hill near Blood River, to be called thereafter Conference Hill – a meeting which, notably, was not attended by the king at all but only by his ministers. On this occasion the opposition to Shepstone was fierce, his patent conflict of interest not patched over by a latest compromise scheme. (This certainly was a case where confederation showed up in its compromise nature. When the eastern Transvaal Boers lost

their claim to the Zululand side of the Blood River, Frere in his capacity as High Commissioner, decided to allow them to stay on their farms in the disputed territory under a guarantee of British protection, while granting Cetshwayo “nominal sovereignty” over the land.) So where does nominal sovereignty end and British protection begin? One colonial official said it was like giving shells to the Zulus and oysters to the Boers. A more picturesque summary of Shepstone’s predicament was that of Mnyamana: “So he is a good man, one who pisses with his legs apart; he plants one leg on the other side of the Thukela, and the other in the Zulu country ...”.¹⁹

Shepstone’s apparent favouritism to the king now showed up in less favourable colours. The spokesman for the council (Buthelezi) furiously accused Shepstone not only of going over to the Boers but also of deserting the king and betraying their friendship. Shepstone tried to wriggle out of the predicament, but “a great rumble of anger” cut short his words, and the Zulus stormed away from the meeting.

In fact it was not only Shepstone that they were displeased with. As one commentator concludes:

His (Shepstone’s) standing with the Zulus was never the same again ... they (the council) were angrily aware that Cetshwayo had used the coronation to assert his power over them. He alone had agreed upon the coronation pronouncements²⁰

In fact, even in colonial jurisprudence, council and king were not counted as independent sovereign bodies. The Boundary Commission, chaired by Bulwer, stated unambiguously that “the Zulu king did not have the power to cede land without the consent of the council of chiefs ...”.²¹

In a way this was a blow to the whole Shepstonian approach. Shepstone was famed for his infinite patience with the humblest suitor, and the success of his locations was widely attributed to his tolerance of slow tribal procedures. But there had now arrived on the scene an imperial master who suggested something almost sinister in Shepstone's attitude. Frere summed up Shepstone as of a demeanour closer to the tribesmen he interviewed than of a colonial official. He called him an "Africander Talleyrand, shrewd, observant, silent, self-contained, immobile". His chief disciple in Natal was characterised "by an apparent absence of all effort to devise or substitute a better system ...".²²

If Shepstone did not realise that he was losing the trust of his boss, he must have realised by now that he had forfeited his close bond with the Zulu king. He must have ridden back from Conference Hill realising how the machinations of power really worked in Zululand. Hence the words which he penned to the High Commissioner, and which couldn't have suited Frere better:

One thing is quite certain, that if we are forced into hostilities, we cannot stop short of breaking down the Zulu power, which, after all, is the root and real strength of all native difficulties in South Africa²³

This was certainly a different Zulu power from that which had gathered for the fabricated coronation, where Shepstone could well-nigh pose as a surrogate prime minister. The senior council, now – while always speaking respectfully of the king – could see through Cetshwayo's personal agenda. As for Shepstone's own sentiments, Sir Henry Bulwer noticed the change:

You make no reference to the possibility of this being settled by peaceful means ... but are giving instructions for the destruction of the Zulu power, and for the Zulu Nation ceasing to exist as an independent Nation²⁴

Added Bulwer: "We are looking to different objects ...".

This was certainly not the last time Shepstone rode back to Natal with the antagonism of the Zulu military elite ringing in his ears. But the next time he did so he would have the comfort of knowing that, under a Liberal ministry, he was Her Majesty's Representative in Zululand. Indeed he might already suspect that the royalist party in Zululand would be destroyed, not by the British, but by the Zulus themselves.

Sioux

The continuing crisis of identity consequent on federation politics occurs less blatantly in the US than in Natal but on a larger scale. The problems Shepstone had in trying to amalgamate none-too-friendly peoples under one flag were minuscule compared with the federal government's attempt to make reservations become the norm for the organisation and pacifying of the Native Americans. When one remembers that the US government had, since Washington's time, entered into multifarious treaties and titles of recognition of assorted tribes, the differentiation between hostile and reserve Indians made a chess-board solution not at all clear-cut. Different messages came back from the pro-Indian agencies on the one hand, and the frontier pioneers on the other. As General Sherman complained: "the people of the frontier universally declare the Indians to be at

war, and the Indian commissioners and agents pronounce them at peace, leaving us in the gap to be abused by both ...”.²⁵ A policeman’s lot is not a happy one!

At first, General Sherman went along with the Medicine Lodge Treaty, devised by pro-Indian agencies and Quaker administrators, because he sincerely hoped that the reservations policy would help (as one commentator puts it) “change nomadic warrior hunters into sedentary agriculturalists and inoculated with Anglo-Saxon values”.²⁶ The spirit of conciliation was such that the Washington leadership even conceded Red Cloud’s demands that key forts on the Bozeman trail be abandoned, a compromise which was none too popular with the militia, bearing in mind the blood, toil and treasure that had been required to maintain the line of forts. In fairness it must be recorded that when the forts were eventually deserted, Red Cloud submitted to Indian Bureau paternalism (Fort Rice 1868) leaving only the unswerving Sitting Bull to maintain the hostile cause.

However even as the Medicine Lodge Treaty was tabled came reports of Cheyenne raids across the fragile divide between so-called ceded and unceded territory. General Sheridan (Sherman’s junior) viewed these raids as “the basest kind of perfidy”.²⁷ Even the pro-Indian Indian Bureau conceded that the government had “met its promises”. But were these raids really a failure of trust? Or the failure of non-literate tribesman to read modern topography?—especially when much of the “wild west” was still unmapped. Their geographic precision may have been defective, but the news that reached them was clear enough. “... They were no less reconciled in 1868 than in 1867 to

yielding the buffalo ranges of western Kansas. Further aggravating their resentment, the railroad now approached the Colorado boundary, drawing fingers of settlement ... into the heart of the buffalo country” As Utley says:

The truth is that, despite sincere professions of peace, most Cheyennes were not ready to abide by the white man’s rules. They had only the dimmest understanding of the contents (ie of the treaties) and mainly saw them a means of getting presents, especially arms and ammunition. Few were prepared to settle permanently within arbitrary lines marked out by the white man²⁸

(The Cheyennes were allies of the Sioux, and in the famous battles of the 1870s may have contributed some 10% of their number.)

Meanwhile Sheridan’s senior, General Sherman, received reports of a sortie by Kew Indians against white encroachment – ravishing women and killing 15 men, robbing and burning soldiers. So much for appeasement! For Sherman this was the sign that the Medicine Lodge Treaty was nullified. In very different mode he issued instructions to Sheridan:

Go ahead in your own way, and I will back you with all my whole authority; if it results in the utter annihilation of the Indians it is but (the result) of what they have been warned again and again ... (I) will allow no more vague general charges of cruelty and inhumanity to tie their hands (i.e. the troops in the field) ... these Indians, the enemies of our race as of our civilisation [shall not be able to] carry out their barbarous warfare on any kind of pretext they choose to allege²⁹

There is a change of emphasis: not that “we” should feel guilty about

breaking dozens of charters and contracts in the course of history, but that “they”, exponents of a divergent life style, obstruct the path of progress. The emergence of a master race emphasis is palpable, as little disguised as Frere’s belief that there should be a dominant power in Southern Africa if civilisation is not to be submerged.

Sherman may have lost patience with the politics of Medicine Lodge, but he still had the American Constitution to deal with, and the arrival of a new president, his Civil War comrade-in-arms Ulysses Grant. To his surprise, it turned out that President Grant had a Peace Plan of his own! The theme was, once again, “conquest by kindness”. Churchmen were appointed, experts were consulted, and there was indeed a smattering of army representation. Grant’s Peace Plan had a slightly ominous codicil however: “The army has sole responsibility for all Indians off the reservations ...”. This was spelt out in detail: the Indian Bureau had “exclusive control and jurisdiction” of all Indians on their reservation, the army of all Indians off their reservation ... the army would treat all Indians off their reservation as hostile ...”.³⁰ Once again an apparently benign doctrine actually tightened the noose of spatial imprisonment, and sought to make the Indians feel unwanted on buffalo land. Reports now arrived with news of the gradual encroachment of the Northern Pacific Railroad, though the railroad’s own legal team was adamant that its route up the Yellowstone Valley did not violate Sioux territory. But for those who had occupied the buffalo plains for generations, the merest approach of a platelayer seemed to spell not only the destruction of the buffalo but the con-

sequence that they would have to “go to the reservation and live on the dole”.³¹

The mounting pressure became evident in the demoralisation of the agencies. More and more the Indians began to treat them as handout offices – especially useful if one was trying to build up an arsenal of firearms. Even the pro-Indian officers of the Indian Bureau could no longer persuade themselves that they were engaged in charitable or missionary work and the stark choice of living free or living on the dole gave all the more sting to Sitting Bull’s taunt: “Look at me – see if I am poor, or my people either ... You are fools to make yourselves slaves to a piece of fat bacon, some hard-tack, and a little sugar and coffee.”³²

The success of such conscience-pricking was palpable: only a small number of Sioux and Cheyennes, of the hundreds milling through the camps, actually registered with the agencies. “For most, the lure of the old hunting life proved as strong as the lure of ... hardtack and coffee.” There therefore developed a culture of shuttling between one and the other, spending half the time at the agencies and half in the hostile camps. The degree to which Sitting Bull could thus arouse an identity guilt in reservation Indians became evident in the migration of young braves back to the unreserved land, though of course many helped themselves to the benefits of agency life before joining the lodges in unceded territory. That north America would never again accommodate the seasonal lifestyle that this double life portended was perhaps not apparent to that last warrior generation. As Utley sums up:

At stake were no less than homeland, subsistence, and way of life. Yet only

dimly, if at all, did the Indians perceive their final wars with the whites in these apocalyptic terms³³

No wonder Sitting Bull was as much sought after as a *shaman* as a war leader. He *did* realise that so aggressive a tribe as the Sioux was entering its twilight zone. With tragic inevitability the humanists who supported the government objective toward the Sioux – “to lure them onto a reservation and subserve them to the apparatus of Indian administration” – identified Sitting Bull as the chief obstacle, thwarting the design for the Indians’ protection. (When General Miles contacted him on neutral ground after Custer’s battle, Sitting Bull told him: “God Almighty had made [him] an Indian, and not an agency Indian either ...!”³⁴)

President Grant’s peace plan allowed the army to think that any Indian not on a reserve could be regarded as “hostile” – a simplification that could soon be used as a leverage to war. The only protection that non-agency Indians had against their wholesale removal off the unceded lands was the small clauses in the 1868 treaty that gave the Sioux hunting rights off the boundaries of the ceded land. But now, in 1874, a particular territory right in the heart of Sioux country, and which had the full legal rights of ceded land, became the subject of controversy. Named “The Black Hills” (because of the way the pine forests caught the light there) this highly desirable stretch of country became the most disputed land in the US.

The Black Hills had always been thought to be gold-bearing, but now traces of the precious metal suggested that it was there in abundance. In June 1874, Lt.-Col. George Custer was ordered to lead an expedition into this most beautiful part of Dakota and assess

its fitness for mining and settlement. He reported back glowingly, using the phrase “there was gold in the grass-roots” – a phrase which rapidly spread across the newspapers of the day. No wonder the Sioux onlookers called Custer’s route “The Thieves’ Road”. And no wonder the army, whose orders were to keep prospectors out and maintain the 1868 agreement, soon lost control. “As soon as they (the troops) left, hundreds of other fortune seekers poured in, the government quite failing to mobilise enough troops to stem the flow” Nevertheless, the Black Hills, right in the centre of the Great Sioux reserve, could not be confiscated, or the legality of the Indian claim be denied. (One must always remember that this tract of Indian Territory was as large as Southern Natal, was entirely unfenced, and that the Indians who had occupied the buffalo plains for generations, were illiterate so far as maps and map-reading were concerned. Indeed “the definition of the unceded territory was ... left obscure whether it extended north of the Bighorns as far as the Yellowstone ...”.³⁵

We don’t have to follow the precedent of Natal history to know that, as soon as the reservations principle can no longer define or maintain its boundaries, it is only a matter of time before a re-allotment of the chequerboard squares might take place. The technique was to find some evidence of misbehaviour in those living on the unceded land and thus having to forfeit the hunting rights they enjoyed on non-agency territory. Once those rights were forfeit, the 1868 treaty could be treated as invalid, and the army policing the area could insist that non-agency Indians report for registration, and thus be subject to their control. Said General Sherman in 1873: “Inasmuch

as the Sioux have not lived at peace ... I think Congress had a perfect right to abrogate the whole of that treaty ... I would like to see the Sioux forced to live near the Missouri River, north of Nebraska ...".³⁶ That was his sentiment before the gold strikes. After the gold strikes the sentiment hardened and the urgency of incipient capitalism meant that the whole American press called for the deregulation of The Black Hills.

The Indians sought the protection of the "white father", believing that Grant's Peace Plan sufficiently protected them. The president received a Sioux–Cheyenne delegation in May, 1875 (the tribesmen suitably in awe of the sights and sounds of a modern city) where the President put on something of a strong act – in no way might the Indians block the path of manifest destiny! Grant reminded them that the government could terminate agency supplies at any time, that whites now outnumbered Indians by 20 to one, and that their best recourse was to cede the disputed land to the United States. Using the argument of numbers, he proposed that they relinquish their homeland and move far south to what would become the state of Oklahoma.³⁷

But in fact a settlement of the Unceded Territory did not resolve the issue of the reservation itself, which was protected by constitutional law. As one might expect, many attempts were now planned to try and cause an incident, a *casus belli*, on the frontier between ceded and unceded territory. But the annual report of the Board of Indian Commissioners, reporting in 1876, steadfastly claimed that there were "no organised acts of hostility by any tribe or band of Indians" in the area³⁸ The Dakota Sioux obviously sensed that, "once fighting broke out, the treaty

would be in tatters" and "the hills annexed as spoils of war ..." Even as hundreds of immigrant miners "slipped through the thin military cordon", so more "disillusioned Indians slipped away from the reservations to join the free-ranging tribes".

At last the executive clique in the White House found their man. This was Erwin C. Watkins, one of three Indian inspectors, whose report of November 1875 might be said to be famous for feeding greedy ears with what they wanted to hear. (One cannot imagine even Frere, devising "evidence" to bring about the Zulu war, proceeding so blatantly.) The report makes no mention of the breaches by whites of the treaty of 1868 (e.g. the invasion of the Black Hills) but accuses the Sioux chiefs like Sitting Bull of being disrespectful of white authority, and of being "lofty, boastful, scornful, savage, untameable, uncivilised". The report concludes with a sort of hymn to Manifest Destiny, claiming that history "owes it (i.e. making war) to civilisation and the common cause of humanity ...".³⁸ This was the report the executive chose to receive!

As one might predict, the difference between ceded and unceded land became the whipping post of the ultimatum that was now served on the non-reserve Sioux. The instruction was that they "remove to a reservation before the 31st of January next; that if they neglect ... to move, they will be reported to the War Department as hostile Indians and ... a military force will be sent to compel them to obey ...".³⁹ General Sheridan forecast that the ultimatum "will in all probability be regarded as a good joke by the Indians", and he was not far wrong. Sitting Bull is reputed to have sent the message "You won't

need to bring any guides. You can find me easily. I won't run away."⁴⁰

Zulu

For Bartle Frere, nothing could have taken the wind out of his sails more than the news, received in late 1877, of the resignation of Lord Carnarvon. Carnarvon was in many ways the architect and motivator of confederation, and Frere must have wondered whether he could continue painting the map red without him. Already there were warnings from the new Colonial Secretary, Sir Michael Hicks Beach, with his instruction that "we should not cease to relax our best efforts to obtain a peaceful solution ...".⁴¹ This was a difficult instruction to obey, since the new Lieutenant-General in South Africa, Frederic Thesiger (soon to become Lord Chelmsford) was an adept exponent of confederation, with a succession of victories on the Cape eastern frontier. Chelmsford was duly invited to lodge at Government House, and learn at first hand what the High Commissioner had in mind.

What he discovered was that he was earmarked for more challenging employment than the Eastern Cape could provide. Bartle Frere's machinations were afoot, feeding the Home Cabinet with so provocative a picture of Zululand that even its most somnolent members might be stirred to belligerence. Such an analysis must reach London before there could be any inkling that the Lieutenant-Governor in Natal (Henry Bulwer) did not favour a military build-up at all. Frere, writing from Durban in September 1877, told Hicks Beach: "The people here are slumbering on a volcano, and I much fear you will not be able to send out the reinforcements we have asked, in time to prevent an

explosion ... The Zulus are now quite out of hand ...". (As Paul Williams says: "This would have been as much a surprise to the Zulus as three years earlier, the Watkins report was for the Sioux, who were supposedly murdering white settlers along the frontier ...".⁴² The "slumbering on a volcano" letter did not get to Westminster until November 1st, and its reception showed that Hicks Beach and his colleagues did not rise to the bait. When they examined Frere's complaints carefully they realised that there was no real crisis at all: the "taking and killing of two refugee Zulu women ... can surely be settled without a war".

We might pause here to recall that, just as the President and his advisers in Washington had to wait for the right voice to justify a war against the Sioux, so perhaps did Frere realise that he was becoming suspected of crying wolf and manoeuvring the home cabinet to support him in a war of his own making. In the same way the Washington government knew that the liberal voice would be loud in complaint if the army acted unilaterally. Why otherwise was the apparently pro-Frere Shepstone now recalled to London? Why else than that, from Frere's point of view, he had outlived his usefulness! Frere wanted to engineer the war on his own, and Shepstone's name would only confirm suspicions. At any rate, Disraeli obviously bought the anti-Shepstonian view:

He has managed to quarrel with English, Dutch and Zulus; and now is obliged to be recalled but not before he has brought on, I fear, a new war⁴³

This sounds like a pen-portrait of Frere himself, and indeed Shepstone would be a convenient butt if Disraeli wanted to clear the High Commissioner's reputation. (Laband's view that

Frere and Shepstone collaborated in the production of the ultimatum does, I believe, have to be qualified.)⁴⁴ Paul Williams makes clear that, not only does Disraeli's comment prove who actually initiated Shepstone's recall, but that in fact a replacement was already named: "Despite Shepstone's pro-war stance, Frere requested his recall and was pleased to see acting Transvaal administrator Colonel Lanyon take over as his replacement".⁴⁵ There is a case for saying that Shepstone's recall was fortunate for him. It meant that when the Liberals Party came to power in 1880 and identified the true manipulator of the Zulu war, he did not have to share the opprobrium that now fell upon Frere. Shepstone was amazingly able to resurrect himself in the Liberal interest, and be recalled from retirement to be Natal's Secretary for Native Affairs. Meanwhile Hicks Beach had unravelled Frere's designs and warned the Prime Minister: "I have sent by tonight's mail a despatch to Frere ... throwing as much cold water as possible upon his evident expectation of a Zulu war ...".⁴⁶ But even with the new steamships, the letter did not reach Frere in time.

The rambling 5 000-word ultimatum was masterly in the way it at once pleased the Liberal ear and yet concealed the way it took Zulu society apart. The clauses censuring the king's "unjust shedding of blood", or stipulating that "young warriors were to be permitted to marry", would have won over any Victorian idealist. The latter would have acquiesced in the requirement that the king could only declare war with the permission of a British Resident, and would have rejoiced in the stipulation that missionaries be readmitted to Zululand. Perhaps it was all a case of selective reading. "To Bulwer, there

was nothing excessive or unjust in these demands ... Even Bishop Colenso, the ultra philo-Zulu", approved of the terms, which he considered commensurate with Britain's "civilising mission" and the "harbinger of better ... days for Zululand ...".⁴⁷

The ultimatum certainly put the Zulus into two minds. At first they set out with a will to pay the penalties, but internecine squabbles soon ensured that the obvious recompense – paying fines in cattle – would never happen. When the king proposed that cattle be collected to pay Sihayo's fine (Sihayo being the main culprit of an illegitimate raid into Natal) the council resisted, believing that Sihayo himself should pay the first instalment. Cetshwayo despaired of bringing his council to one mind. Eventually it seemed easier to go to war, even though it meant serving a king who appeared to be in deep personal crisis. Hence Cetshwayo's "increasingly truculent tone" even when "his personal demeanour became daily more dejected and tearful ...".⁴⁸ Yet on December 30th, 1878, John Dunn – the interpreter who moved between the two camps – wrote that the king had "quite changed his tone" and was determined to fight, since "for what he hears of the forces that are to be sent against him, he can easily eat them up one after the other ...".⁴⁹

One can only say that the young men who took the field at Isandlwana showed no signs of the king's divided disposition.

Sioux/Zulu

The literature that covers the two famous battles of 1877 and 1879 is so sizeable as to make new discussion almost redundant. Nevertheless the comparative approach does make some

points, if only by emphasising their dissimilarity. For instance, in the Zulu battle, the opponents met in set formation and had time to prepare for a field encounter. The British force did indeed come close to success; the blaze of fire from 800 Martini-Henrys very nearly stalling the Zulu charge. But the Zulu response amazed everyone: “Though killed in heaps ... the Zulu did not seem to mind, but filled up their gaps in perfect silence, and [pushed] on with the utmost bravery ...”.⁵⁰

Nor did Sitting Bull’s alliance, as their opponents expected, scuttle away on their fleet ponies. They held their ground and methodically advanced until there were no 7th Cavalry left – not one of Custer’s men left to describe what happened. Both Custer and Durnford had proved suicidally confident in modern fire-power, and divided their forces at tactically inappropriate moments, with Custer in particular coming to the end of the battle 250 short of the number that might have made a difference to the famous last stand.

Gradually the war in North America became one of attrition. The degree to which the Sioux retained order and self-belief in a long migration northwards certainly confirms the fact that Sitting Bull’s chieftainship was a lasting inspiration. By September the huge Sioux/Cheyenne town of lodges that surprised and defeated Custer had disappeared – a mark of their skill, but also of the size and wildness of the North American continent. The fugitive Sioux were still able to put up a fight here and there, but one gets the impression that it was the severity of the winter rather than the enemy cavalry that brought them to extremity. After one skirmish, the temperature plunged to 30° F below zero. Eleven babies froze to death in their

mothers’ arms. In January 1878 Sitting Bull announced that he had called off the war and decided to move north to live in the land of the “Great Mother”. One might detect a sign here of the Native Americans playing off one white tribe against another. A parley was set up just north of the Canadian border, but the Sioux made clear their preferences.

The chiefs truculently rejected Terry’s overtures and dramatised their feelings by effusively embracing the redcoats while declining even to shake hands with the Americans. “You come to tell us lies”, Sitting Bull spat at Terry, “but we don’t want to hear them ...”.⁵¹

Nevertheless, by the summer of 1879 (which brings us to the parallel season with Isandlwana) it was obvious to the 400 or so Sioux who had followed Sitting Bull into Canada that they were in a condition of extreme famine. Some 200 lodges gave up the struggle and returned to their reservations in the US. Sitting Bull’s powers of persuasion had met their match – though he himself was the last to admit it. “So long as there remains a gopher to eat,” he vowed to Major Walsh (of the Mounties), “I will not go back.”⁵² But the gophers proved to be as hard to find as the buffalo. Through 1879 and 1880 the Sioux camps dwindled. “... At last, on July 19 1881, Sitting Bull and 185 men, women and children rode into Fort Burford to surrender, the final vestige of the mighty alliance that had crushed Custer five years earlier ...”

Sitting Bull passed his Winchester to his eight-year-old son to hand over: “I wish it to be remembered that I was the last man of my tribe to surrender my rifle, and this day have given it to you ...”.⁵³

Zulu

Frere was safely back in England before the war that he had so carefully engineered reached its final phase – no one's favourite, it seems, not even that of his own party. It was left to the Liberal government in 1881 to confess that the Zulu war was unjust, to bring it to conclusion (albeit with a promise to restore the Zulu monarchy), and to satisfy the powerful pro-Cetshwayo grouping, who busied themselves grooming the fallen monarch to plead his case in London.

There are several surprises entailed in the return to power of the Liberals. One was the resurrection of Theophilus Shepstone, who had obviously been recalled from South Africa just in time to escape being tarred with the Frere brush. Called out of retirement after the war, he was surely at ease with a scheme that out-Frere Frere, partitioning Zululand into 13 administrative states. As a matter of fact, Shepstone found fault with the all-too-neat, mathematically divided Zululand that Garnet Wolseley ("the very model of a modern major-general") laid on the drawing board. "Shepstone proposed an alternative, which favoured leaving hereditary chiefs with certain of their former powers so long as these were executed under the supervision of white officials"⁵⁴

The next surprise, which must have disconcerted Cetshwayo's admirers, was the growing realisation that the Zulu people, so far from being unified by their common suffering in war, were actually on the brink of a deep civil dissension; so deep that, as it turned out, it led to an even bloodier confrontation than with the British. We have to risk some long-term perspectives at this point; (certainly the terms "class war" or "anti-royalist" would not have squared with Zulu understanding).

Why did the Zulus of the 1880s quit the unity and regimentation of a warrior class? One interpretation is that Zulu dissension – especially after the royalist Usuthu and the anti-royalist Mandlakazi showed their true colours – took on the revolutionary flavour of a class war. There was a restlessness in the rank and file of the warrior people who had recently shown their worth to their king. (One must remember the changing social scene in South Africa after 1879. The components of heavy industry were already being railed and wagoned to the interior, even before the discovery of the goldfields in 1888.)

The royalist reading of Zulu history tends to attribute the malevolence that split the nation to "one only man", namely Zibhebhu, the leader of the Mandlakazi force. But does it make sense to credit one man only with so striking, so overwhelming, a victory as that won over Cetshwayo at oNdini? After all, the uSuthu initiated the fight:

The uSuthu marched in a great column thirty men wide and several kilometres long ... With vengeful abandon it burned and plundered as it went⁵⁵

I don't say that Zibhebhu was in any way a more attractive or worthier leader than Cetshwayo. (One might, in another civil war, regret that the unattractive roundheads outfought the more attractive cavaliers. Horsemanship being in question, however, one might mention that Cetshwayo was now so physically large that a horse could not be found to carry him. And if we dislike Zibhebhu as the king's prole rival, we must note that in almost all his victories he entered the fray mounted on his white horse!)

So why did Cetshwayo not retain his following, despite being the darling of the London public during his exile?

In a brief summary of the conditions under which the king might return to Zululand – undoubtedly composed by Shepstone – the king “undertook not to revive the military system, to allow men to marry when they chose, and to encourage his people to seek work in Natal and the Transvaal”. These were surely minimal liberties needed by a people who had so long lived under regimental discipline. Laband interprets these conditions as “the triumph of the Natal interest ...” and speaks almost pityingly of a king who could hardly rule if “the main pillar of the old kingdom, namely the military system, had been pulled away ...”.⁵⁶ But if this was the Natal interest, it was also that of Bishop Colenso, who, as we have seen, had greeted (along with Bulwer and others) those terms contained in the Ultimatum as the “harbinger of better days ... for Zululand”.⁵⁷

Those better days touched the lives of ordinary militia in the Zulu army. This was signally demonstrated by the overwhelming and disciplined support they now gave to the anti-royalist cause. The chief of the anti-uSuthu faction, Zibhebhu, appeared alone at Cetshwayo’s reception, and showed his colours by greeting Shepstone rather more warmly than the returned monarch. During this reception the royalists staged a protest at the conditions of the king’s return – very similar to those that raised their fury at Conference Hill back in 1877. Zibhebhu and his followers had obviously aligned themselves with that programme, and thus made by implication the dissolution of the military system *their* cause – freeing marriage from regimental dictates, and freeing one to seek work south of Zululand. These reforms made possible the social flexibility that was probably not appro-

priate in the 1870s but was increasingly needed in the 1880s. As Laband points out, the eventual dissolution of the Zulu military system was not only the work of the conquering British. It was also the work of the younger *amabutho* themselves, who had “made the most of the changing circumstances to take wives without the king’s permission”.⁵⁸ Men who had given heart and soul for the king in the late war had no wish to return to the class-dominance embodied in the uSuthu.

I admit that this theory collides with the widely-accepted view, where a unified Zululand regains its legitimate king, but is denied its expected happy days by the machinations of Zibhebhu and the ill-will of the Department of Native Affairs in Pietermaritzburg. The view that this, the bloodiest civil war in Zulu history – perhaps even in South African history – was in some part the device of Shepstone and his allies in the Mandlakazi camp, is hardly backed by the facts. Shepstone returned to Natal on 29th January, and the uSuthu now spent two months planning their strike. They finally marched on Zibhebhu on March 29th (despite Fynn’s warning that this would be read as an affront to the Crown.) Cetshwayo, suffered a massive defeat. Magistrate James Gibson believed that “in no other battle did a Zulu army ever suffer greater loss of life”.⁵⁹ Cetshwayo tried to rally support through May and June summoning thousands from far and wide, but his subsequent defeat (20th July) was as decisive as the first.

The scale of the royalist defeat is beyond the capacity of any one man’s, or government’s, machinations to bring about. Let us return to Henry Bulwer (who, as we have seen, was not prone to Shepstone idolatry).

Bulwer put it quite bluntly when he stated that the attack on Zibhebhu had been orchestrated by the Ultra-Uxutu party with the king's connivance, and that if Cetshwayo did not intend to abide by the conditions of his restoration, "he ought never to have returned ...".⁶⁰

That the battle of oNdingi was a class war seems to be proven by the grisly evidence of the battlefield. "... [T]he list of illustrious dead reads like a roll-call of the old Zulu kingdom."⁶¹ In the first (Msebe valley) battle only 10 Mandlakazi were killed, in contrast to the thousands of uSuthu slain. And in the second (July) phase, only seven of Zibhebhu's men were killed. Routs of this order cannot be attributed simply to one man's military skill. It is almost a relief to record that, although Cetshwayo was to die a defeated king, (given sanctuary in a cottage at Eshowe) Zibhebhu's forces did suffer one serious setback at Ivuna in 1888, losing 200 killed.

To congratulate a people for "having a civil war" is not a comfortable procedure. One has to resort to a degree of conjecture at this point. I would speculate that that new term in the Shepstonian conditions for the return of the king, namely that young men be encouraged to seek work in Natal and the Transvaal, had a popularity that defeated the uSuthu party. My strategy should be apparent: to raise the question why the Zulus could, unlike the Sioux, transform from a warrior people to a migratory proletariat, without forfeiting identity. It does seem to me possible to claim that Shepstone's policy has much to do with the double personality needed to survive the coming of the industrial state. Unlike the Sioux, who conceded nothing to what we might today call

modernisation, and who trod the lonely, heroic path of a warrior-hunter race that marched to their doom, the Zulus did not accept the complete loss of status that seemed an inevitable consequence of becoming an urban proletariat. We might say that, in Sioux terms, they at once suffered the demotion of going to live in the agencies, and yet retained their blood connections with hearth and home (in Sioux terms, the band of hunters) which Shepstone had always insisted on keeping intact. Minimal coercion was needed to press ordinary Zulus to live out this complicated double life. As Shepstone himself admitted, British control was more or less founded on an administrative duplicity. (See his Memo of 31 July 1887: "The small force of Zululand Police could do little more than represent the power behind it" and it was "inadvisable for a civil administration ... to be perceived to be directly dependent on military intervention".⁶²

Dinuzulu was to express the hope that "his country would not be carved up like Natal into white-owned farms and black locations",⁶³ and we might admit that that indeed was a Shepstonian landscape. But it was a landscape that was to last another century, until the time when Zulus themselves could become landowners and wielders of political and economic power in their own right.

Buffalo Bill

Disasters of the scale of Isandlwana or The Little Bighorn found a newspaper public all too ready to think of Victoria's Empire as a progressive cause, or to think of the United States as by vocation the rulers in North America. Military figures could become national figures. The ways in which both Cetshwayo and Sitting Bull put their notoriety to use



Sitting Bull was able to play along with the tactics of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show while that gave him a platform to plead the cause of his people. (Photo from the mid 1880s)

after the event gives an indication of the technique of tapping into an Anglo-American audience in the second half of the century.

One young man ready to exploit the national greed for news was William Cody, soon to be known as Buffalo Bill. There was a huge audience for him not only to play out a “duel” in mock rehearsal but to style it as Custer’s Revenge! (Some savants even count this as the primary event of what was to become the film industry.)

On the other side of the ocean, Cetshwayo was to discover that his erstwhile enemy enjoyed the sheer publicity of his visit to Britain (he spent some months in Cape Town Castle learning the necessary codes of dress and so on, and how best to present his case in an interview with the queen.)

Cetshwayo was lionised by fashionable society and (crucial for his cause) met many important public figures. The Queen, whose grandsons he had received in Cape Town, and to whom

he had conveyed his pleas to be restored to his kingdom, granted him an audience of a quarter of an hour at Osborne. Their meeting passed off most amiably⁶⁴

Well and good, but the incident might have the same questionable effect as Buffalo Bill's patronage of Sitting Bull. The great chief soon on learned the best method of pleading his cause. He joined Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show in 1885, signed autographs, shook hands with President Grover Cleveland, and delivered speeches in the Lakota tongue which, of course, few could understand. What was really happening is exemplified when a special train reached Bismarck on the Northern Pacific Line

(itself named for publicity reasons – to attract capital from Northern Europe!)

At Bismarck, another gala celebration awaited the excursionists. Here the leading orator was the defeated Sitting Bull, who delivered his speech in Lakota – a bitter denunciation of land thieves and liars, which was translated by an army officer into English metaphors of benevolent hospitality. The affluent listeners, in their expensive suits, top hats, boiled shirts, and gold watch chains, gave Sitting Bull a standing ovation, and then boarded their palaces-on-wheels to resume their journey west⁶⁵

Is winning an audience more effective than winning a war ...?

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