

# Triumph of the Zulus



Zulu warrior with knobbed staff

By Pete Sundiata

"We are in a state of war."

These words, frequently repeated by Public Enemy member Sister Souljah, are meant to convey the idea that our people need to understand our current situation in terms of the flow of history, that the war white invaders waged upon our people in Africa was a war that continues to this day.

Strong stuff. Not everyone would describe the state we find ourselves in as one of war. Repression, yes. Oppression, yes. But War? In fact, not everyone would agree that the state of relations between Africans and Europeans was ever one of war. War is comprised of armies and generals, battle plans and strategies — sophisticated stuff, something not perceived as being African. If Africans fought at all, this view goes, they fought haphazardly, with people running everywhere, hooping and hollering.

The truth is quite different. While our African armies eventually lost to European ones, the reason is primarily that Europeans developed advanced weaponry at a far faster rate than did we. The strategy, execution, and bravery of our forces were never found wanting. Indeed, these qualities were what held the invaders at bay.

It was less than eleven decades ago that the Zulu army won a decisive battle over British forces. Despite eventually losing the war, the courage and discipline shown by the Zulus in achieving this victory should be held up as an example of African determination and strength against formidable opposition. It would do us well to recall this battle now.

The Zulus had been living peaceably with the neighbouring British colony in Natal (both are part of what is now South Africa), but a small cadre of British officers could not bear the thought of a strong, confident, African nation looming right next door. A disinformation scheme (yes, they had them back then) was launched with the home office in London, exaggerating any points of friction and hostility between the two. Before long the war was on.

Around January 20, 1879, an army of British soldiers and African stooges invaded "Zululand," as it was called by the British. They were in search of the Zulu army and stood ready and eager for their first fight. They soon got it.

On January 22 the Zulu army attacked at a place called Isandlwana. It was a bloody battle. The end of the conflict saw men with assegais (spears) pitted against those with bayonets. While both sides suffered heavy losses, the British went down in the

most devastating defeat they had ever felt in their colonial wars. Fifty-two British officers, about 500 African stooges, and 806 British soldiers were killed in the battle. More British officers were killed in this one battle than were killed in all the fighting at Waterloo.

The Zulus, too, suffered heavily, losing over three thousand men to the superior firepower of the British. The main reason the numbers weren't higher was due to the strategic planning and organization of the Zulus. They attacked using their time-tested "buffalo's horn" method. In a disciplined manner, they sent out two "horns" from the sides of their forces, with the aim of encircling the opposition, and emerged victorious.

The British forces, on the other hand, were overconfident, planned their attack poorly and fell prey to their own sense of

**"Africa my Africa....  
I have never known you  
But my face is full of your blood."**

David Diop

self-importance. In one unbelievable instance, regular soldiers could not get ammunition from their supply officer as he insisted on maintaining bureaucratic order and even went so far as to have the men line up for supplies. This was done even as the Zulus were closing in.

The defeat of the British in this battle sent shock waves all the way to the throne in England. They simply did not think such a thing possible. They tried to explain it away by saying the Zulus had no fear of death, and would simply hurl themselves like a great black mass against any opposition. With so many dead, the British no longer took the Zulus for granted.

The battle of Isandlwana recalls one bright spot in our wars with the Europeans. The wars have ended, at least in the conventional sense of armies and generals. But is the fight for freedom and equality not really just an extension of the war the Zulus fought, a fight against white domination?

Certainly the rules of the game have changed. There are no military positions, battle plans or the like, but are we not still subject to racial discrimination and military abuse in the form of the police, and disinformation?

Perhaps the war Sister Souljah speaks of is an undeclared one. If so, it would do us well learn from the Zulu warriors the benefits of discipline, courage, and strategy. An undeclared war is not fought with assegais and bayonets. It is fought with intelligence and bravery.

**CAUTION!!**  
**COLORED PEOPLE**  
**OF BOSTON, ONE & ALL,**  
You are hereby respectfully **CAUTIONED** and advised, to avoid conversing with the **Watchmen and Police Officers of Boston,**  
And they have already been actually employed in **KIDNAPPING, CARRYING, AND KEEPING SLAVES.** Therefore, if you value your **LIBERTY,** and the **Welfare of the Fugitives** among you, **Shun them in every possible manner, as so many *SHUTTERS*** on the track of the most unfortunate of your race.  
**Keep a Sharp Look Out for KIDNAPPERS, and have TOP EYE open.**  
APRIL 24, 1861.

Posters like this warned slaves in the 'free' states of their danger, and many fled to Canada.

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from existing legislations of all references about separate schools for blacks.

As a Liberal MPP in the Ontario legislature, Leonard Braithwaite, in the first black elected to a provincial parliament in 1963. He is instrumental in the introduction of the amending act. The last segregated school closed its doors in 1965 in Essex County, Ont.

1968  
Lincoln Alexander of Hamilton, Ont., becomes the first black member of the House of Commons.

Roosevelt Douglas, a black student activist, organizes student protest at St. George's University in New Brunswick because of the racism experienced by black students.

1969  
Representatives of black organizations and institutions meet in Toronto to establish the National Black Coalition of Canada, the first such national black organization in the country.

1972  
Rosalind Brown becomes the first black woman to sit in a Canadian legislature when she is elected as the NDP MP for

Vancouver-Burrard. In 1970 she was the first on-bus woman for the status of women and once introduced a bill to establish collective bargaining rights for tenants and supported rent control.

1973  
A general amnesty is granted to all non-status immigrants in Canada.

1975  
1,500 Haitians are deported when Canadian authorities don't accept their argument for seeking refugee status under the Refugee Status Act.

1979  
Marianne Green, a founding member of the Black Education Project in Toronto, encourages radical changes in the thinking and policy making of Toronto educators.

Before the work of Green and other Black activists, there were no race relation departments, heritage programs or mechanisms to deal with racism in the school system.

1979  
Lincoln Alexander, Liberal MP for Hamilton West, becomes

the first black federal cabinet member as Minister of Labour under the Trudeau government.

*Although few American slaves were branded, none had personal or legal rights that an owner was bound to respect.*



1983 to present  
Increasingly more Black men and women are now in prominent positions in social and political organizations.

- For example:
- Jean Augustine
  - Stephanie Pane, Education Trustee for the City of North York
  - Zanana Akande, First Black Woman MP for Ontario
  - Alvin Curling, Liberal Politician
  - Anne Cools, First Black Woman appointed to Canadian senate
  - Ben Johnson, Premier sprinter for Canadian track team
  - 1988, Olympics
  - Lennox Lewis, Gold medalist, Olympic boxing champion
  - 1984
  - Oscar Peterson, World renowned Jazz pianist and Chancelor for York University

Also within the last decade, there has been an elevation of consciousness within the black community. Much of this awareness stems from continued discrimination within Canada's social and political infrastructure. For example, the police on Black shooting, which claimed the lives of Wade Lawson, and Lester Donaldson, has united many Canadian black organizations in the fight against racism on Canadian police forces.