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# The Boer War in Colour

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In the opening section of the book, the author highlights the importance of infusing technological revolution in photography, in order to capture the essence of the Anglo-Boer War that broke out in 1899-1902. The war impacted South African society politically, socially and economically. It also changed the political landscape of the country in various respects. The Afrikaners suffered a crushing defeat in the war and were circumstantially obliged to regroup as a nation.

The book presents a pictorial history of the Anglo-Boer War which represents technological and digital realms in modern times. The author contends that since the beginning of the 21st century, there have been developments in the technological and digital spaces. Le Roux's practical application of the technological revolution in photography in this book, is a modern milestone. The title: 'The Boer War in Colour', attracts the reader to explore the unique format of the book. It further triggers an interest in what really sets it apart from previous publications on the Anglo-Boer War. At first glance, the phrase: '*A picture is worth a thousand words*', rings true. The overall format of the book is beautiful, it makes the reading thereof a pleasant experience. The effective use of full colour enhances the magnificence of the photographs. The visual images of the war presented in the book, capture the interest of the reader. Furthermore, emotions are evoked and the reader becomes more empathetic through this visual representation of the war. The book stretches beyond the boundaries of literacy and covers a broader spectrum of the reading audience. The people who cannot read can easily grasp the true essence of the war. The participants in the war and how it impacted them was fairly captured through the use of photographs. It sought to provide a balanced version of the war and its features. However, the book does not delve deeper into full scale war and its intricacies. The narrative provided is not extensive enough given the gravity of the war and its impact on South African

society. There are no chapters in the book, only a brief overview of some episodes of the war that have been covered. Selected albums that portray visual images of the war reign supreme in the book as opposed to an in-depth account of the war. Extensive coverage of the war coupled with visual images, would have been more welcome. In essence, the author explains in some more detail the selected photographs, rather than a more detailed account of the war. The book covers the conventional phase of the war particularly from October 1899-September 1902. The Afrikaner infiltration into Natal and the Cape Colony, the siege of Ladysmith, Kimberly and Mafikeng. The major battles such as Elandsplaagte, Magersfontein and Paardeberg, are some of the aspects of the war that were covered in the book. The author further provides visual images of the campaigns, life in the concentration camps, gunners in action, infantrymen on the march, the burghers, nurses, musicians and prisoners of war.

However, some crucial aspects of the Anglo-Boer War such as the military positions of the British and the Boer armies, the role of Blacks, British Scorched Earth Policy, the role of Emily Hobhouse, the guerrilla tactics of both armies, various places within the country where the battles took place, the crushing defeat suffered by the Boers and the Treaty of Vereeniging which concluded the war, were not covered extensively in the book. A much more detailed narrative on these aspects, coupled with relevant photographs, would have been judicious. Fransjohan Pretorius, South Africa's renowned historian who has written extensively on the Anglo-Boer War, contends that it is terrific to experience the Anglo-Boer War in colour, which represented various episodes endured by its participants. The author provides a brief account of the causes of the war, which is highly contested. Some scholars believe that the war was primarily fought over South Africa's mineral resources, particularly gold on the Witwatersrand. It was more of an imperial war waged by the British on the Boers, seeking to harness the country's mineral resources. The Afrikaners were merely resisting British imperialism.

Le Roux argue that the origins of the war can be traced back to the 19th century and the British occupation of the Dutch Cape Colony in 1806. The issues of governance by the British drove the Afrikaner farmers out of the Cape Colony. They embarked on what was known as the *Great Trek* and headed to the hinterland literally running away from British control. They were also looking for good farming prospects and better grazing land for their livestock. The Boers were mainly the descendants of the Dutch, German and French settlers. They sought total emancipation from British control and economic prosperity. The author demonstrated the semblance of growth and development of the Boers after leaving the Cape Colony. They managed to assert themselves as an independent nation. Eventually

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two Boer Republics were established namely: Transvaal and Orange Free State. At first, the British recognized the independence of the Boer Republics, however, such recognition was short-lived. It would have been prudent to highlight the two phases of the Anglo-Boer War and the fundamental differences between them. The first Anglo-Boer War was triggered by the British attempt to annex Transvaal in 1877. It then broke out from 1880-1881. In this phase of the war, the Boers emerged victorious. The British suffered a crushing defeat at the Battle of Majuba Hills at the hands of the Afrikaners. The Transvaal independence was therefore restored. The discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand in 1886, made Transvaal the richest province in the country and the entire Southern Africa. Such economic prosperity attracted migrant workers from a variety of world countries. The spectre of challenge presented by this economic development was an increase in the number of foreign migrants which outnumbered the Boers in the Transvaal who were mostly farmers. The Transvaal Government was left with no option but to impose strict control measures on immigration. Franchise and full South African citizenship were among the conditions laid down by the Government, in order to mitigate the impact of immigration on the country's economy and political stability. Interestingly enough, Le Roux sheds some light on how Transvaal's economic prosperity was manipulated by the imperialists such as Cecil John Rhodes who was prime minister of the Cape Colony at the time, in order to achieve their selfish ends. Rhodes used the Uitlanders question as a pretext for imperial expansion.

He attempted to stage a Coup d'etat in the Transvaal led by his close ally Dr Jameson. The aim was to topple the Transvaal Government. A well-armed group invaded Transvaal from Bechuanaland (Present-day Botswana). However, the Jameson Raid was thwarted by the Boer Commando long before they reached Johannesburg. The Boers in the Transvaal and Orange Free State decided to step up their security. They embarked on a re-armament programme, acquired an arsenal of modern arms mainly from Germany, France and also from Britain. Jameson resigned following the failure of the Raid that he orchestrated and carried out. The Boers were now united by a common goal, which was to rid themselves of British control and occupation of their territories. Under the presidencies of Paul Kruger in the Transvaal and Marthinus Steyn in the Orange Free State, the Boers demanded the withdrawal of the British army from their provinces. They laid down an ultimatum to that effect, which the British Government rejected outright. The Boers were left with no option but to declare war on 11th October 1899.

At the beginning of the war, the British army was at the highest peak of its military preparedness. They had a military advantage over the Boer army. The author does touch on the military strategies of the Boers. The focus was on the elimination of the British garrison

towns and the railway lines closer to their borders. The Boer offensive took place on in October and November 1899 on three fronts namely:

- 1) Natal front which features northern Natal: Newcastle, Ladysmith, Colenso and Escourt.
- 2) Western front, Cape Colony: Mafikeng, Kimberly and Belmont.
- 3) Central front, Cape Colony: Colesberg and Stormberg region.

On the Natal front, the Boers achieved some level of victory, however, they lost the first two Battles at Dundee (Talana Hill) and Elandsplaagte. The author's coverage of the Battles that took place on these fronts is commendable. It provides the readers with perspectives on both the Boers and British offensives. However, a visual representation of these Battles would have been more welcome. Furthermore, it would have been more interesting for the author to provide a much more detailed account of the Battles that took place on other fronts within the country, coupled with photographs relevant enough to compliment the entire narrative. The format of the book has challenged conventional approaches which accounts for its uniqueness. The author has demonstrated innovation and creativity which help the reader capture the true essence of the Anglo-Boer War and its overall impact on South African society.

The book has successfully represented various episodes of the Anglo-Boer War through the full use of photographs. It responds to modern trends which are technologically driven. Furthermore, it demonstrates the extent to which historiography fits in the digital world. Such innovation will undoubtedly encourage history teachers to explore avenues of technology which will make the teaching and learning of history a pleasant experience. Pictorial versions of history writing have been confined to primary school learners with an understanding that they best suit their cognitive levels. Le Roux's book is challenging this notion. In light of the visual representation of the war, pictorial versions of history cut across all cognitive levels. They help simplify the content and make the entire reading fascinating to the reader.