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| The Boer War |
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| The British Empire waged two wars in southern Africa at the close of the nineteenth century. In the First Boer War (or Transvaal War) of 1880-1, Boer soldiers repelled Britain’s attempt to annex the diamond-rich Transvaal. The tense peace that followed was broken by the outbreak of the Second Boer War (or South African War, or Anglo-Boer War) of 1899-1902, the largest and most significant war the British Empire waged between the 1857 Indian Rebellion and the Great War of 1914-1918. Fighting began when Britain sought to declare sovereignty over the Transvaal and Orange Free State, where huge gold deposits had recently been discovered. This provoked anti-British sentiment in southern Africa and among Britain’s colonial rivals, inspiring volunteer soldiers from the Netherlands and Germany to fight alongside the ethnically Dutch and German Boers. In the end, Britain lost millions of pounds and thousands of lives before reaching a peace settlement that would recognize British control over the Boer republics while offering a path to self-government (laying the foundations for both the Union of South Africa in 1910 and that dominion’s white separatist rule). In England, the war also exacerbated concerns over national degeneration when more than half of recruits failed military fitness exams (owing to the deprived living conditions of the urban poor), raising fresh questions about Britain’s imperial ambitions at the turn of the century. Though initially a popular war among Britons, the war’s grim aftermath had a deeper impact on modernism. ‘Since that period,’ Ford Madox Ford (né Hueffer) reflected, ‘the whole tone of England appears to me to have entirely changed’ (171). |
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| Further reading:  (Doyle)  (Ford)  (Judd and Surridge)  (Nasson)  (Omissi and Thompson) |