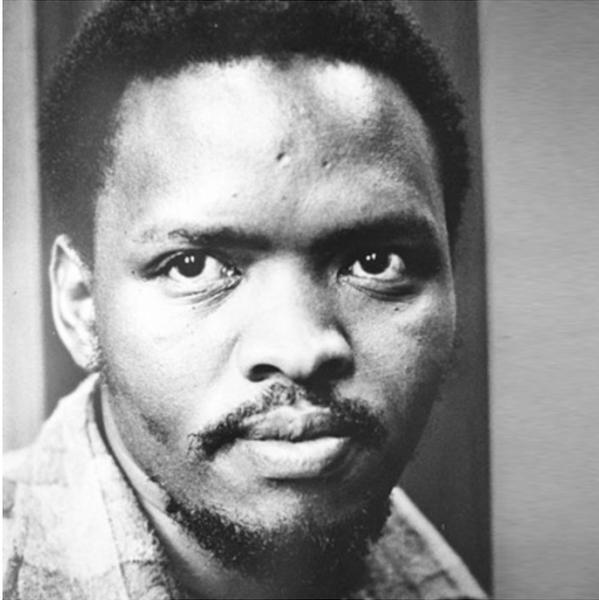


Stephen Biko

“In Sesotho there is a saying 'motjheka sediba ha a se nwe' ('he who digs a well does not drink from it'). Only those who come after him will quench their thirst from its cool water. When the forebears formulated this adage, they had Steve Bantu Biko in mind, even as he sat in the world of pre-creation waiting to be created”



Stephen Biko was an anti-apartheid activist and the co-founder of the South African Students' Organization, subsequently spearheading the nation's Black Consciousness Movement. He also co-founded the Black People's Convention in 1972. Biko was arrested many times for his anti-apartheid work and, on September 12, 1977, died from injuries that he sustained while in police custody.

Early Years

Bantu Stephen Biko was born on December 18, 1946, in King William's Town, South Africa, in what is now the Eastern Cape province. Politically active at a young age, Biko was expelled from high school for his activism, and subsequently enrolled at St. Francis College in the Mariannhill area of KwaZulu-Natal. After graduating from St. Francis in 1966, Biko began attending the University of Natal Medical School, where he became active with the National Union of South African Students, a multiracial organization advocating for the improvement of black citizens' rights.

Co-Founding SASO and the Black People's Convention

In 1968, Biko co-founded the South African Students' Organization, an all-black student organization focusing on the resistance of apartheid, and subsequently spearheaded the newly started Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa.

Biko became SASO's president in 1969. Three years later, in 1972, he was expelled from the University of Natal due to his political activism. That same year, Biko co-founded another black activist group, the Black People's Convention, and became the group's leader. This group would become the central organization for the BCM, which continued to gain traction throughout the nation during the 1970s.

In 1973, Biko was banned by the apartheid regime; he was forbidden to write or speak publicly, to talk with media representatives or to speak to more than one person at a time, among other restrictions. As a result, the associations, movements and public statements of SASA members were halted. Working undercover thereafter, Biko created the Zimele Trust Fund to aid political prisoners and their families in the mid-1970s.

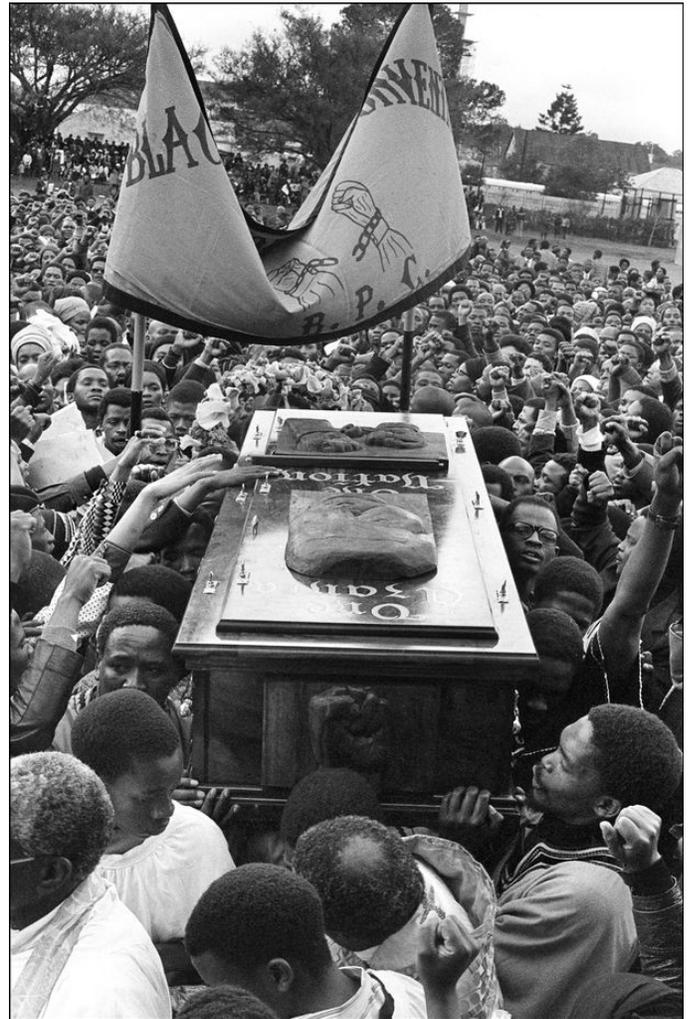
Arrests and Death

During the late 1970s, Biko was arrested four times and detained for several months at a time. In 1972, he helped organize the Black People's Convention and in the next year was banned from politics by the Afrikaner government. Four years later, in September 1977, he was arrested for subversion. While in police custody in Port Elizabeth, Biko was brutally beaten and then driven 700 miles to Pretoria, where he was thrown into a cell. On September 12, 1977, he died naked and shackled on

the filthy floor of a police hospital. News of the political killing, denied by the country's white minority government, led to international protests and a U.N.-imposed arms embargo.

In 1995, after the peaceful transfer to majority rule in South Africa, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established to examine decades of apartheid policy and to address the widespread call for justice for those who abused their authority under the system. However, as a condition of the transfer of power, the outgoing white minority government requested that the commission be obligated to grant amnesty to people making full confessions of politically motivated crimes during apartheid. Nobel Peace Prize laureate Desmond Tutu was appointed to head the commission, which was soon criticized by many South Africans for its apparent willingness to grant pardons.

In early 1997, four former police officers, including Police Colonel Gideon Nieuwoudt, appeared before the commission and admitted to killing Stephen Biko two decades earlier. The commission agreed to hear their request for political amnesty but in 1999 refused to grant amnesty because the men failed to establish a political motive for the brutal killing. Other amnesty applications are still in progress.



Legacy

Today, the legacy of Steve Biko lives on through the work of a number of institutions in South Africa and the international community. Among them are the Stephen Biko Foundation; The Brazilian Stephen Biko Cultural Institute as well as the Liverpool England based Stephen Biko housing association. In the tradition of Biko these institutions focus not only on material issues such as housing, education and healthcare; seeking to achieve Biko's vision of a more human face, they also focus on issues of history, culture and identity.