



## **Biko**

*Donald Woods*

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Subjected to 22 hours of interrogation, torture and beating by South African police on September 6, 1977, Steve Biko died six days later. Donald Woods, Biko's close friend and a leading white South African newspaper editor, exposed the murder helping to ignite the black revolution.

## **Biko Details**

Date : Published September 15th 1991 by Holt Paperbacks (first published 1978)

ISBN : 9780805018998

Author : Donald Woods

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Genre : Nonfiction, Biography, History, Cultural, Africa, Southern Africa, South Africa, Politics

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## From Reader Review Biko for online ebook

### **Kathleen says**

Do not watch "Cry Freedom" before reading this book if you are expecting it to be like the movie. Same subject matter, but Cry Freedom is about getting the book itself out of the country.

Although a little bit boring in spots, it very much explains the struggles that those men of color in South Africa had to go through to have thier messages heard.

The moral of the story: Do not let these deaths be in vain--all should take lessons from the struggles of the Blacks in South Africa and remember that I can happen again--and we should do all that we can to prevent it.

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### **TawanaMarie says**

I read this book when I was in the 3rd grade. This one of the two books my mom gave to me the other one was Roots.

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### **Theophilus (Theo) says**

Steven Biko, a black student activist in South Africa during the 1970s, was murdered while in custody of the South African police, who claimed it ws suicide. Apparently he beat himself so badly that he died from his injuries. Donald Woods, a white South African journalist, found a story he could not let go, even at the insistence of the S.A. government. He personally knew Biko and resolved to tell the true story of what happened. With his own family the victim of police intimidation and threats, he managed to flee the country with his family to England where he published his account of the covered-up incident. The book outlines Biko's activities, his arrest, and trial in dignified detail. The courtroom dialogue between Biko and his judge are provided through transcripts of the trial. This story was not in my school history books at Indiana U. A great book made into a great movie called "Cry Freedom".

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### **jay says**

I watched the movie first then read the book. Horrific experiences. Really nasty stuff happened to this young man in his quest to free his people. The author also made loads of sacrifices.

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### **Rebecca Davis says**

Steve Biko died in police custody on September 12, 1977, six days after being arrested by South African police. An unauthorized (secret) autopsy revealed brain trauma caused by severe blows to the head was the cause of death.

Biko was the leader of the Black Consciousness Movement, an organization that promoted liberation and

political change through peaceful, non-violent means of resistance. Because Biko's words challenged the ruling Afrikaner Nationalist Party's apartheid government, he was considered a danger to the state and was "banned." This meant he was on house arrest and forbidden to meet with more than one person at a time outside his immediate family. He was arrested while traveling outside his banning area.

Steve Biko was a natural leader with "natural gentleness" and a "razor-sharp" intellect, a quick sense of humor. "We were drawn to him at once. Physically, he was an imposing figure, very tall, extremely well-built with a noble face. He was not an extrovert—one had the sense of a great capacity for self-containment. He spoke quietly, generally unemotionally, and all the time one was aware of his acute sensibilities—his ability to listen, to sift and make judgments on the people were saying to know what they were really like" (211). He spoke to gatherings of people and published widely. His speeches and articles have been collected in the book *I Write What I Like*.

Police Commissioner Kruger announced at a press conference that Biko died after a hunger strike. Everyone who knew him knew this to be false. He had, in fact, told his friends that if something happened to him, they should know he would never have taken his own life. When his announcement led to sniggering among his supporters, one even complimented him on running such a democratic system that he "allowed his detainees the democratic right to starve themselves to death" if desired. Kruger, "preening," agreed. In response to questions, Kruger said Biko's death "leaves me cold." He added, "I suppose one feels sorry about any death. I suppose I would feel sorry about my own death." The callousness of this response speaks for itself.

The book chronicles the relationship between journalist and newspaper editor Donald Woods and Steve Biko. Woods at first wrote rather unfavorably about the rather well-known actions and words of Steve Biko. When challenged to meet him and learn the truth before printing his stories, Woods set out to meet Biko. Drawn to him (as shown above), the two and their wives and families became friends. Woods' stories changed. Biko was killed. Woods wrote in protest, and was himself banned. When his own family came under attack, they finally escaped the country with the manuscript of this book, narrowly escaping being killed.

The book was published in 1978, only a year after Biko's death. It was made into the movie *Cry Freedom* in the late 1980s, both while apartheid was still in practice. Steve Biko became an international icon and helped move the world to sanctions against South Africa until the apartheid system changed.

In South Africa, I asked one Black man if he had read the book or seen the movie *Cry Freedom*. He said he had, but what he didn't like about the movie was that it was all about Donald Woods' story, more than about Biko's story. This is true, I guess, though the book certainly details much more than the movie could, of course, especially transcripts from "interrogations" and court proceedings during the inquest into Steve's death. The positive side of seeing this from Woods' point of view is the ability to move with him through his change of heart—from a racist white South African—to a broad-minded, inclusive freedom-minded individual willing to risk his own life for the freedom of all South Africans. That transformation can affect a reader or watcher perhaps more powerfully.

Reading this book, walking through King Williams Town and Port Elizabeth where Steve walked, standing at his grave and spending time in the Steve Biko Museum all build into an emotional experience. Steve Biko is, and will forever be, one of the heroes of my life. BIKO!

The movie "Cry Freedom" is based on this book. On Youtube, Peter Gabriel sings the song "Biko" using clips from the movie. All are worth your while!

## Amelia says

Woods provides a complex and detailed portrait of Steve Biko, a leader of the Black Consciousness movement in South Africa during the period of apartheid, and conveys the extent of the oppression instituted by the South African government on blacks and outspoken whites. Though Woods does not appear to shy away from his or Biko's negative attributes, it is very easy to identify and sympathize with both and find oneself outraged at the way Biko's life was cut short.

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## Ona says

I don't generally like biography as a genre, but this book is particularly bad. The first third is about Woods, the author, not Biko, the subject. A considerable amount of the remainder is simply direct legal transcripts from the inquest into Biko's death. Everyone should read about Biko and his significance in South African history & politics, but this is NOT the go to book.

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## r says

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## Trisha says

Inhoud:

Op 6 september 1977 werd de leider van de Zwarte Bewustwordingsbeweging Steve Biko door de Zuidafrikaanse veiligheids politie gevangengenomen.Hij werd 22 uur verhoord,gemarteld en geslagen en overleed zes dagen later aan een fatale hersenbeschadiging. Het boek vertelt het verhaal over Steve Biko en zijn strijd.

'Ik ben ervan overtuigd,' zegt Donald Woods tien jaar later,' dat niemand aan de top Steves dood wilde. Daarvoor was hij te bekend en te zeer martelaar voor het herstel van de zwarte trots en het zwarte zelfrespect.Toen ze zich realiseerden hoe zwaar ze hem verwond hadden, besloten ze het karwei af te maken.'

Waardering:

Het boek is een aanrader voor mensen die meer willen weten over de apartheid in Zuid-Afrika in de jaren 70. Vaak moesten deze strijders het met de dood bekopen. Dit boek geeft goed weer hoe de zwarten werden onderdrukt. Biko is in Europa niet zo bekend als Nelson Mandela, maar zou toch ook de eer moeten hebben die Mandela heeft gekregen.

Zijn biografie is geschreven door een blanke, maar ga er niet van uit dat hij bagataliseerd. Donald Woods heeft namelijk zelf te lijden gehad onder het Blanke Bewind in Zuid-Afrika, omdat hij vrienden had onder de

zwarte bevolking en opkwam tegen apartheid. Woods heeft uiteindelijk zelf voor zijn leven moeten vluchten.

Boekinformatie:

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In 1987 verscheen de film Cry Freedom. Het is een film geregisseerd door Richard Attenborough, die zich afspeelt in de jaren zeventig, tijdens de apartheid in Zuid-Afrika. De film is opgenomen in Zimbabwe.

Hoewel de film niet in Zuid-Afrika verboden was, werd er wel bedreigd met bomaanslagen door extreemrechtse blanken. De film is gebaseerd op het gelijknamige boek door John Briley.

Cry Freedom is een gedramatiseerde versie van het verhaal van Steve Biko, de Zuid-Afrikaanse leider van de Zwarte bewustzijnsbeweging. Hij werd vermoord terwijl hij in gevangenschap zat. Donald Woods, een blanke redacteur van de krant de Daily Dispatch, die bevriend was met Biko, schreef een boek met onthullende delen over de dood van Biko. Hij probeerde Zuid-Afrika te ontvluchten om het boek gepubliceerd te krijgen.

Rollen: Steve Biko - Denzel Washington; Donald Woods - Kevin Kline; Woods' vrouw Wendy - Penelope Wilton; Jimmy Kruger - John Thaw; Mamphela Ramphele - Josette Simon; Vader Kani - Zakes Mokae; De officier van justitie - Ian Richardson

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## Rowena says

I heard a lot about Steve Biko growing up. I had never imagined him being so young when he was murdered (only 30 years old) because of all he had achieved and how inspirational he was, and still is.

This is perhaps the first biography I have read which was written by a friend of the subject. Donald Wood is a very courageous white South African who became one of Biko's closest friend and was subsequently involved in South Africa's struggle against Apartheid. What I admired about Wood was the fact that he was quite transparent about his previously racist views (I guess he was a product of his environment). I may be being a bit idealistic but it gave me some hope at least that racist people can change with some education and dialogue.

The book basically outlines Biko's life. The excerpts of conversation, including the articles Biko published and the court transcripts of his trial, show an exceptionally intelligent, strong-willed person, with passion for equality.

All Steve Biko wanted was to make his fellow oppressed black South Africans proud of their origins, thus he founded an organization that preached Black Consciousness: "The philosophy of Black Consciousness, therefore, expressed group pride and the determination by blacks to rise and attain the envisaged self." It doesn't sound so bad but unfortunately his views made him a "banned person" (ridiculous term), which means he was not allowed to move freely around the country. He was placed under surveillance, arrested, and his phonecalls were monitored too. I have to mention that the South African police were extremely childish in how they dealt with Biko and his family at times, unbelievable.

The ending of his life was just so tragic, the pictures in the book have unfortunately been ingrained into my memory. May Steve Biko rest in peace.

## Alex Roma says

This was not an enjoyable book to read, nor did I expect it to be. Well, actually, there were enjoyable parts to it. I enjoyed meeting the character of Biko and some of the banter in the friendship between Biko and Donald Woods (the author). Even though I knew how it ended, he was such a warm person and so passionate about what he believed, that I enjoyed reading about who he was when he was alive.

It was when I wasn't reading this book that was hard. It was hard to focus on other conversations or little irritations that I would normally complain about when my brain kept going back to the fact that Apartheid was a thing that actually happened--that these people were people who actually died, that these laws were actually in place for several decades. Before I read this book, I knew about Apartheid in that I knew it existed and it was pretty bad for black folks in South Africa. I knew who Nelson Mandela was. I didn't know that many details about Apartheid. And I'm glad that I do know what I know now, because it's something that's important to educate yourself about. But it is pretty awful, and it's an intense reading experience.

A lot of things, unfortunately, felt relevant to things that have been coming to light lately with the Black Lives Matter movement. Not just the police brutality, but the way the Black Consciousness Movement was received and misconstrued. The Black Consciousness Movement was an exclusively black movement to separate the blacks hoping to throw off their oppression from white liberals who were often well-meaning but misguided and more harmful than anything else most of the time. As Biko explained it, the point of the movement was to restore consciousness to black people and make them confident and independent again in a way that couldn't be achieved through another petition or through their white "allies" talking over them. White liberals--including Woods himself, at first--took offense to being excluded and complained that black consciousness was itself racist. It sounds similar to white folks complaining now about "reverse" racism. I've seen arguments, and I'm sorry to say even made the mistake of starting a few, where white "allies" take offense to being excluded from certain conversations about anti-blackness. There's still a whole shit load of "well, not all white people!" And supposedly well-meaning white allies DO still have the bad habit of talking over the people whose voices actually need to be heard, the ones actually being oppressed. I'm only just learning to find the balance between being an ally and not overstepping, and I don't think I'll ever get it completely right.

That does lead to the conflicting thing about this novel: it's about a great black man and influential leader of an anti-Apartheid movement, and it's about the way that Apartheid oppressed the black majority in South Africa, but it's written by his white friend. And I commend Woods for writing it and think it's something he absolutely needed to write. He himself was banned for writing about Stephen Biko and he risked his life writing this and then escaping the country to get this book published, to tell the world who Stephen Biko was and exactly what Apartheid was. And while he talked about his views and how Biko changed those views, he didn't try to make the book about him. The focus was always on Biko, on his life, on the inquiry into his death, on testimonies from the friend that was arrested with him on what actually happened in that prison. But I think the great injustice here is that the person who SHOULD have written this book was unable to because he was beaten to death in prison. In the end, it was Woods' white privilege that allowed this book to be published and I would say it's his white privilege that allowed it to be so well-received. That's probably one thing that bothers me about the movie (Cry Freedom) because the writers made a choice to make the movie less about Biko and more about the process of writing the book (therefore making Donald Woods the main character, rather than the observer/narrator to protagonist Biko). But that's a different review and I would need to watch the movie again to be more thorough in it. The book was good, I'm glad that I read it, but be prepared to be shaken up.

## **Neville Prince says**

Tough reading, but very important. I liked it enormously. Very difficult to wrap one's head around such terrible things that were done to Biko. The movie is different, by the way, and is not simply a re-telling of this book. This is a study of a very important man, and done with sensitivity and history and subdued anger. A really good thing to read if you have any interest in the history of apartheid and the current turmoil in race relations in 'that' country.

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## **EuGene Byrd says**

I'm almost finished reading this book, and when I'm not reading it, I'm thinking about the things I've read. I recommend this book to everyone, and I think it is a must read for every Black person. Steve Biko was killed simply because he tried to raise 'Black consciousness' in South Africa. His writings are still relevant today, as I believe that we still need to raise our 'Black consciousness' here in the US.

These are OUR heroes, learn about them and pass what you have learned to your kids and the youth.

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## **Thom Dunn says**

from the back cover: "Bantu Stephen Biko, perhaps the most important Black leader to have emerged in South Africa, was tortured and killed by the Security Police in September, 1977. This book, written in defiance of a banning order by Biko's close friend, Donald Woods, the white newspaper editor who led the protests after his death, offers a remarkable personal and political portrait of the murdered leader. It includes a concise history of South Africa's racial policies and closes with a ringing manifesto calling for action against the South African regime." (from the Vintage Book edition, copyright 1978).

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## **BeeQuiet says**

Having read the 1987 version of this book I felt I was viewing a snapshot of a very particular time. At the time of the printing of this edition, South Africa was in a state of turmoil, and as Donald Woods correctly pointed out, the question was not if violence would increase, but when.

This book is written in a rather propagandist time, but unusually I do say this as a means of levelling criticism. Instead, the desperation of Woods to convince the international community that it was of incredible importance to stop supporting apartheid by vetoing economic sanctions.

I quite honestly had no idea of the vast legacy left by Steve Biko - without the Black Conscious movement, who knows what might have ended up happening in South Africa. This is a wonderful book and I would recommend it to anyone both as a factual read and as a work of incredible humanity.

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