



Steve Biko

A Brief Biography

BIKO
3 0 3 0

Bantu Stephen Biko was born in Tilden on the 18th December 1946, the third child of the late Mathew Mzingaye and Alice Nokuzola "Mamcethe" Biko. He attended primary school in King William's Town and secondary school at Marianhill, a missionary school situated in a town of the same name in Kwa-Zulu Natal.

Steve went on to register for a degree in medicine at the Black Section of the Medical School of the University of Natal in 1966. Very early in his academic program, Biko showed an expansive thirst for knowledge that far exceeded the realm of the medical profession, and resulted in him being one of the most prominent student leaders. In 1968, Biko and his colleagues founded the South African Students' Organization (SASO). He was elected the first President of the organization at its inaugural congress held at Turfloop in 1969. This organization was born out of the frustrations black students encountered within the liberal and multi-racial National Union of South African Students (NUSAS).

In the eyes of Biko and his colleagues, NUSAS showed signs of an organization unwilling to adopt radical policy positions and comfortable with playing safe politics. The questions that triggered the formation of SASO became known as the 'best able debate': Are white liberals best able to define the texture and tempo of resistance? SASO was founded, therefore, as a call to black students to refrain from being spectators in a game in which they should be participants.

Maintaining working relationships with other student organizations, SASO's primary engagement was to address the inferiority complex that was the mainstay of passiveness within the ranks of black students. It was not long before SASO became the most formidable political force spreading to campuses across the country and beyond. After serving as the organization's President, Biko was elected Publications Director for SASO where he wrote prolifically under the pseudonym, Frank Talk.

With the seed of black consciousness having been sown outside of student campuses, Biko and his colleges argued for a broader based black political organization in the country. Opinion was canvassed and finally, in July 1972, the Black People's Convention (BPC) was founded and inaugurated in December of the same year.

Inspired by Biko's growing legacy, the youth of the country at the high school level mobilized themselves in a movement that became known as the South African Students' Movement (SASM). This movement played a pivotal role in the 1976 Soweto Uprising, which accelerated the course of the liberation struggle. The National Association of Youth Organizations was also formed in order to cater for the youth more generally.

Biko was instrumental in the development and formation of a core SASO project - the Black Workers' Project (BWP), which was co-sponsored by the Black Community Programs (BCP) for which Biko worked at the time. The BCP addressed the problems of black workers whose unions were not yet recognized by the law. After being expelled from Medical School in 1972, Biko joined the BCP at their Durban offices.

The BCP engaged in a number of community-based projects and published a yearly journal called the Black Review, which provided an analysis of political trends in the country. In March 1973 Biko was banned and restricted to King William's Town. There he set up a BCP office where he served as Branch Executive. It was not long before his banning order was amended to restrict him from any association with the BCP.

Despite his banning, the office that he had established did well, managing, amongst other achievements, to build the Zanempilo Clinic and a crèche, both of which were very popular with the community.

As an example of his resolve and indestructible black pride, Biko was also instrumental in the founding of the Zimele Trust Fund in 1975, established to assist political prisoners and their families. This he achieved in spite of the inconvenience and restrictions placed on him by his own banning order. He continued his community work, setting up the Ginsberg Trust to assist black students. In January 1977 the BCP unanimously elected Biko Honorary President in recognition of his momentous contribution to the liberation struggle.

In his short but remarkable life, Biko was frequently harassed and detained under the country's notorious security legislation. This harassment culminated in his arrest, together with his colleague and comrade Peter Cyril Jones, at a Police roadblock outside of King William's Town on the 18th of August 1977. Biko and Jones were tortured at the headquarters of the Security Division, housed in what was then known as the Sanlam building in Port Elizabeth. It was during this period that Biko sustained a massive brain hemorrhage. On 11 September 1977 Biko was transported to Pretoria central prison - a twelve-hour journey, naked, without medical escort, in the back of a police Land Rover.

Biko died on the floor of an empty cell in Pretoria Central Prison on the 12th of September.



steve biko
foundation

BIKO
3 0 3 0