

Bantu Biko - the founding father of BC philosophy

Azapo Historical Background

BANTU STEPHEN BIKO

December 18, 1946 - September 12, 1977

A PROFILE

"We have set on a quest for true humanity, and somewhere on the distant horizon we can see the glittering prize. Let us march forth with courage and determination, drawing strength from our common plight and brotherhood. In time we shall be in a position to bestow upon South Africa the greatest gift possible - a more human face". Steve Biko.

The above quotation from Steve Biko's essay: "Black Consciousness - A Quest for a True Humanity", perhaps encapsulates his mind frame and the role that he set himself towards the betterment of his people, given their experience, which he shared.

Bantu Stephen Biko was born in Kingwilliamstown on the 18th December 1946, the third son of the late Mr & Mrs Mzimgayi Biko.

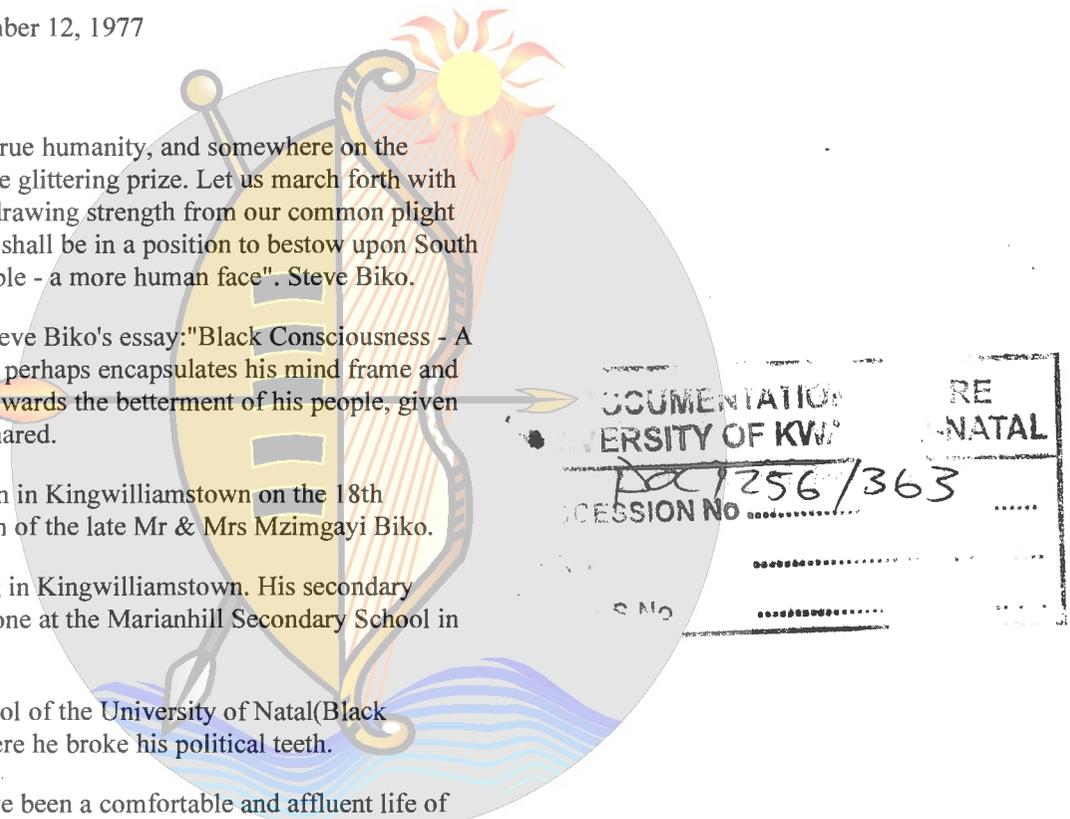
He did his primary schooling in Kingwilliamstown. His secondary schooling was virtually all done at the Marianhill Secondary School in Kwazulu.

He entered the Medical School of the University of Natal (Black Section) in 1966. This is where he broke his political teeth.

Biko gave up what could have been a comfortable and affluent life of the stethoscope to selflessly work for the total liberation of his people.

He and his colleagues founded the South African Students' Organisation (SASO) in 1968. He was elected the first President of the organisation at its inaugural congress held at Turfloop in 1969. This organisation was borne out of the frustrations Black students encountered within the multi-racial NUSAS and geared itself at addressing those frustrations and problems of black students and black people generally.

But the black students, under his leadership, went on to further argue that they were black before they were students and argued for a black political organisation in the country. Opinion was canvassed and finally the organisation, the Black People's Convention (BPC), was founded in July 1972 and inaugurated in December of the same year.



Through his inspiration, the youth of the country at high school level were mobilised and this resulted in the formation of the South African Students' Movement (SASM). This is the Movement that played a pivotal role in the 1976 Uprisings, which accelerated the course of our liberation struggle.

The other formation was the National Association of Youth Organisations (NAYO), which catered for the youth generally.

He was instrumental in the formation of one of SASO's projects, the Black Workers' Project (BWP) which was co-sponsored by the Black Community Programmes (BCP) for which Steve worked. This project addressed problems of Black workers whose unions were then not recognised in law.

After serving as President, Biko was elected Publications Director of SASO where he wrote prolifically under the pen name Frank Talk in the SASO Newsletter.

On leaving the Medical School in 1972 - from which he was expelled, Steve joined the BCP, which he co-founded, in their Durban offices.

This organisation engaged in a number of community based projects and published a yearly, Black Review, which was an analysis of political trends in the country.

In March 1973 he was banned and restricted to Kingwilliamstown. There he set up a BCP office where he worked as a Branch Executive. But soon his banning order was amended to prohibit him from working or associating with the BCP. The BCP did well however, building a clinic, the Zanempilo Clinic, and a creche, both of which were very popular.

Despite the inconvenience brought about by the restriction order, Steve was instrumental in the founding of the Zimele Trust Fund in 1975. This was set up to assist political prisoners and their families. This was another example of the man's resolve and his indestructible black pride.

In Ginsberg, he set up the Ginsberg Educational Trust to assist black students.

In January 1977, the Black People's Convention (BPC), in recognition of his momentous contribution to the liberation struggle, unanimously elected him its Honorary President.

In his short but remarkable political life, Steve was always a target of the "system". He was frequently harassed and detained under the country's notorious security legislation.

On the 18th August 1977, he was arrested in a police roadblock with his colleague and comrade, Peter Cyril Jones and detained under Section 6 of the nefarious Terrorism Act.

Steve and Peter had in fact been to Cape Town, despite Steve's banning, to lend their weight to efforts to get all political organisations of the people to agree to a broader programme of co-operation to advance our course. His quest for black unity was eventually to cost him his life.

That is the kind of man Steve was, no price was ever too high for him if what was asked of him was to advance the struggle.

Unfortunately, this detention rudely interrupted Steve's noble journey in his quest for a true humanity. His death in detention at the hands of the operatives of one the most savage and repressive regimes ever known to humankind, less than a month after his detention, robbed the country of one of its foremost political thinkers and analysts.

But, he did us proud as people, because even in the face of his death, he remained dignified. The man died on his feet and not on his knees as the enemy would have loved.

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