Anti-Apartheid

Participants

Level 2

**Steve Biko**

Steve Biko spearheaded the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa. He died in 1977, from injuries sustained while in police custody.

## Synopsis

Born in South Africa in 1946, Steve Biko co-founded the South African Students' Organization in 1968, subsequently spearheading the nation's Black Consciousness Movement, and 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'd 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-'70s.

**Arrests, Murder and Legacy**

During the late '70s, Biko was arrested four times and detained for several months at a time. In August 1977, he was arrested and held in Port Elizabeth, located at the southern tip of South Africa. The following month, on September 11, Biko was found naked and shackled several miles away, in Pretoria, South Africa. He died the following day, on September 12, 1977, from a brain hemorrhage—later determined to be the result of injuries he had sustained while in police custody. The news of Biko's death caused national outrage and protests, and he became regarded as an international anti-apartheid icon in South Africa.

The police officers who had held Biko were questioned thereafter, but none were charged with any official crimes. However, two decades after Biko's death, in 1997, five former officers confessed killing Biko. The officers reportedly filed applications for amnesty to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission after investigations implicated them in Biko's death, but amnesty was denied in 1999.

**Personal Life**

In 1970, Biko married Ntsiki Mashalaba. The couple later had two children together: sons Nkosinathi and Samora. Biko also had two children with Mamphela Ramphele, an active member of the Black Consciousness Movement: daughter Lerato, who was born in 1974 and died of pneumonia at 2 months old, and son Hlumelo, born in 1978. Additionally, Biko had a child with Lorraine Tabane in 1977, a daughter named Motlatsi.

http://www.biography.com/people/steve-biko-38884