

M.M.

### *Cry Freedom*: Does it Reveal Everything?

The film *Cry Freedom*, by Richard Attenborough is based upon Stephen Biko's life mainly through the eyes of Donald Woods. Donald Woods, a white reporter, and Stephen Biko, a black anti-Apartheid activist, became friends in the movie. In the beginning, Woods was against Stephen until he interviewed him face to face and was convinced of the pain that blacks went through. The film was about how Apartheid, which is the legal segregation of blacks and whites in South Africa-affected the black people of South Africa. It may seem as though all blacks were innocent and all whites were cruel people, but the movie did not show everything. *Cry Freedom* portrayed Stephen Biko's outspoken personality, however, after watching this film which is connected to Black History Month, one can have a new perspective on people's differences.

"Black children-smart or dumb-were born into poverty," said Stephen Biko. Born in Kinwilliamstown, Cape Province, Stephen Biko was in the Black Consciousness Movement. He made a difference for a lot of black South Africans by standing up for his race and proving to the whites that he and his people are just as equal as they are. He did not like the idea of Apartheid because it affected his people in various ways. It gave black people the sense that they did not measure up to the whites. "With the enactment of apartheid laws in 1948, racial discrimination was institutionalized. Race laws touched every aspect of social life, including a prohibition of marriage between non-whites and whites, and the sanctioning of "white-only" jobs. In 1950, the Population Registration

Act required that all South Africans be racially classified into one of three categories: white, black (African), or colored (of mixed decent). The coloured category included major subgroups of Indians and Asians. Classification into these categories was based on appearance, social acceptance, and descent... All blacks were required to carry "pass books" containing fingerprints, photo and information on access to non-black areas"(http://www-cs-students.stanford.edu/%7Ecale/cs201/apartheid.hist.html). In the movie, whites treated blacks brutally. For instance, white police officers raided black people's hometowns because they didn't have legal work permits or townships, therefore the policemen drove them back to their homelands. Perhaps, the film exaggerated its scenes. The movie favored blacks over whites, but never really showed that there were some helpful and courteous white people out there that defended blacks and protested against Apartheid. In addition, blacks are not as peaceful as they seemed to be in the movie. I felt like the movie should have been more focused through the eyes of Stephen Biko rather than Donald Woods. Perhaps it should have replaced Donald Woods' long escape with a more interesting scene. However, the movie accurately proved how cruel whites could be. Unfortunately, when Biko was arrested, he died in police custody. The police brutally beat him to death. "Sadly, the story of Steve Biko's death is not unique, it is a tragedy that is replayed countless times every day in repressive third-world countries, invariably those whose governments can afford to stay in power despite popular support through corporate investiture from first world nations" (http://www.curriculum units.com/crucible/whunts/frames\_for\_bioko\_biography.htm). However, there were black police officers. *Cry Freedom* is historically accurate movie, but it just exaggerated the scenes and only showed how black people felt. In addition, it gave its movie viewers the

idea of being racist towards whites. The Apartheid in South Africa is connected to Black History Month.

Throughout the month of February, Americans and blacks celebrate Black History Month. This month is the remembrance of all the struggles black people had to go through and their contributions to our country. This could mean that events such as slavery, racial discrimination, Apartheid, and the difference that black people made would be a part of the whole idea of celebrating Black History Month. “Americans have recognized black history annually since 1926, first as "Negro History Week" and later as "Black History Month. "What you might not know is that black history had barely begun to be studied—or even documented—when the tradition originated. Although blacks have been in America at least as far back as colonial times, it was not until the 20th century that they gained a respectable presence in the history books”

(<http://www.infoplease.com/spot/bhmintro1.html>). Black History Month connects with the events that occurred in the movie *Cry Freedom* because it focused on how whites colonized South Africa and controlled the people there. For instance, blacks could not travel beyond their hometown otherwise white policemen would confiscate them.

Through Apartheid, black people suffered from racial discrimination by the whites. In the film *Cry Freedom*, Stephen Biko took Donald Woods to visit a township. The site of this township was vile because it was a poor area and there was only one clinic for blacks in all of South Africa. This showed how black people did not get the same treatments whites did, due to Apartheid. Therefore, the history of Apartheid would be considered as a struggle to celebrate on Black History Month. On the other hand, after watching *Cry Freedom*, one can have a new view on people's differences.

Before watching *Cry Freedom*, I always carried the idea with me that blacks in the past struggled due to the brutal treatment of the whites. I never realized the sufferings and hardships black people went through until *Cry Freedom* gave me a clearer picture. It was tremendously distressing to watch these black people in misery, suffering from legal segregation. Legal segregation, also known as Apartheid, meant that black people had restrictions and a shortage of food supply. I think that the blacks should have been treated equally. In today's society, none of what happened in South Africa exists today, with the exception that some people out there are racist. In the movie, Stephen Biko's death was a symbol of how cruel whites were in South Africa. After watching *Cry Freedom*, I am now more aware of the dilemmas black people went through.

Overall, the movie *Cry Freedom* proved to its movie viewers of how badly Apartheid affected blacks and how Stephen Biko stood up for his people. Although the scenes of the movie exaggerated on some of the scenes, not showing that there were some white people out there that protested against Apartheid, it showed how atrocious the whites in South Africa were. *Cry Freedom* gave me a better picture of what life was like in the past for South Africa. It gave me a different perspective of black people. In addition, the struggles that black people went through are related to Black History Month because the whole idea of celebrating this month is to remember the pain whites put blacks through. In this case, Apartheid greatly affected black people.

## Annotated Bibliography

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