

## Cry Freedom Essay

In the movie, Cry Freedom, directed by Richard Attenborough, the characters portrayed, the restrictions of apartheid at that time in Africa shown, and the overly harsh punishments felt by many in the black community were represented in a historically accurate fashion. The characters represented are truthful to their actual opinions, roles and names. Apartheid restrictions, shown in the movie, such as the requirement of blacks to carry paper, the requirement of a work permit to take and keep a job, and the 6:00pm curfew steered true to restrictions felt during Steve Biko's time (1975-1977). Another factual part of the movie was the way the punishments received by the blacks for breaking apartheid were much harsher than those that would have been received by a white person.

The characters represented in Cry Freedom are either exact copies from real life characters or people whose roles in Donald's life existed, but whose names, and details aren't actually known. For instance, Steve Biko was an actual person in history. His name, age, and philosophy in the movie stood true to his real life. In fact, BBC Online did a piece on his death stating that, "Biko, a leader of the black consciousness movement in South Africa, died of major head injuries in South African police custody." (BBC Online <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/2253092.stm>). This conforms to a point in the movie where it was revealed that Biko was killed by the police, not by some hunger strike.

Donald Woods, another principle character in Cry Freedom, was very accurately portrayed in retrospect to his real life counterpart. Not only was the name the same, the general style of the real Donald Woods and the movie Donald Woods (Kevin Kline) is remarkably precise. Not only was Woods' style shown accurately, but his job was also. "... [Donald Woods,] editor of the Daily Dispatch from 1965..."(BBC Online <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/1499587.stm>) This shows he really was a newspaper editor, and he was also vehemently against the apartheid government and their heavily racist views. The movie also contained a lot of minor parts as well, such as people who rioted, and the corrupt police who shot at the protestors. There was a health clinic with a few doctors. It is not known exactly whom all the real life versions of these minor parts are, but we do know their roles and responsibilities actually existed.

In addition to the characters being real in Cry Freedom, the apartheid restrictions felt by them were also true to life. In the movie there was a point where Steve Biko and an accomplice were stopped at a roadblock. When they were stopped, the inspecting officers asked for papers, but the papers were not just Drivers Licenses, they were passbooks. In 1952, the Pass Laws were enacted by the African Government into Apartheid. This law stated that all blacks had to carry passbooks, so the government could regulate travel through the country. This was a very insulting piece of racism, because this law treated blacks like dogs, which had to stay in their yards. It was paired up with another real life law that was purely to degrade blacks, which came up during the late night stop. According to apartheid, blacks weren't allowed to be about past 6:00 pm. This law goes along with the thinking that blacks were only as good as children (i.e. children need a bedtime). In another section of the movie, an invasion of a black township was shown. The place was filled with people who had no work permit yet had work. They were either killed in the destruction or went on the run. The people, who by some struck of luck, had working permits watched their lives and cities destroyed, and

were exiled into another part of the country. These work permits were an actual requirement in the time of African apartheid. The Authorities had multiple uses including the excuse to destroy a town in “searching” for the permits. They could punish black people by forcing them out of work or forcing them to work cheap, making the white corporations’ profits even more.

The excessively harsh punishments given to blacks in the movie were accurately portrayed from real life events. At the end of the movie, there is a specific scene that gruesomely displays the historical punishments of blacks. In a black township in Sowento, a student protest broke out. In order to “suppress” the protesters the police killed more than 570 people over a period of eight months. Their thinking was actually that by killing the protestors, they would make the blacks less angry. At another point in the movie, we witness the containment of lead character Steve Biko. He was taken into prison and beaten to within an inch of his life. In real life, it says that he died in police custody, but that is a very skeptical thing, considering he was a perfectly healthy person. Steve Biko would not be the last black leader killed. In the last few minutes of the movie, a scrolling list of murdered black leaders appears on the screen. The names go on for a few minutes, in full blocks, three rows wide.

The movie, Cry Freedom, accurately displays the various characters, restrictions, and punishments, which existed in the real world environment. It took time, but Biko was right, it did eventually get better. Eventually universal suffrage elections are held, and the blacks get Nelson Mandela into office. It is essentially a downhill battle from here, after the miles after terrible miles of painful uphill arguments.

## Annotated Bibliography

1. Attenborough, Richard, Dir. Cry Freedom. MCA Home Video, Inc. 1998. This was the basis for my essay, because it was the side of the topic I had to annualize the historical accuracy of.
2. BBC News. SA activist Donald Woods dies. February 18, 2003. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/1499587.stm> I used this site in the section in my essay proving the roles, and other historical accuracies of Donald Woods.
3. BBC News. Row clouds Biko anniversary. February 18, 2003. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/2253092.stm> This site was used in examples thought the essay pertaining to the historical accuracy of Stephen Biko.
4. Biography. Biko, Stephen (Bantu) (, known as Steve Biko). February 19, 2003. [http://search.biography.com/print\\_record.pl?id=7581](http://search.biography.com/print_record.pl?id=7581) I used this site to reference some facts for Stephen Biko. It was also a useful summary of his life
5. Facts.com South Africa's Apartheid Era and the Transition to Multiracial Democracy. February 18, 2003. <http://www.facts.com/cd/o94317.htm> This site was used for facts on the different Apartheid events, and dates having to do with them.