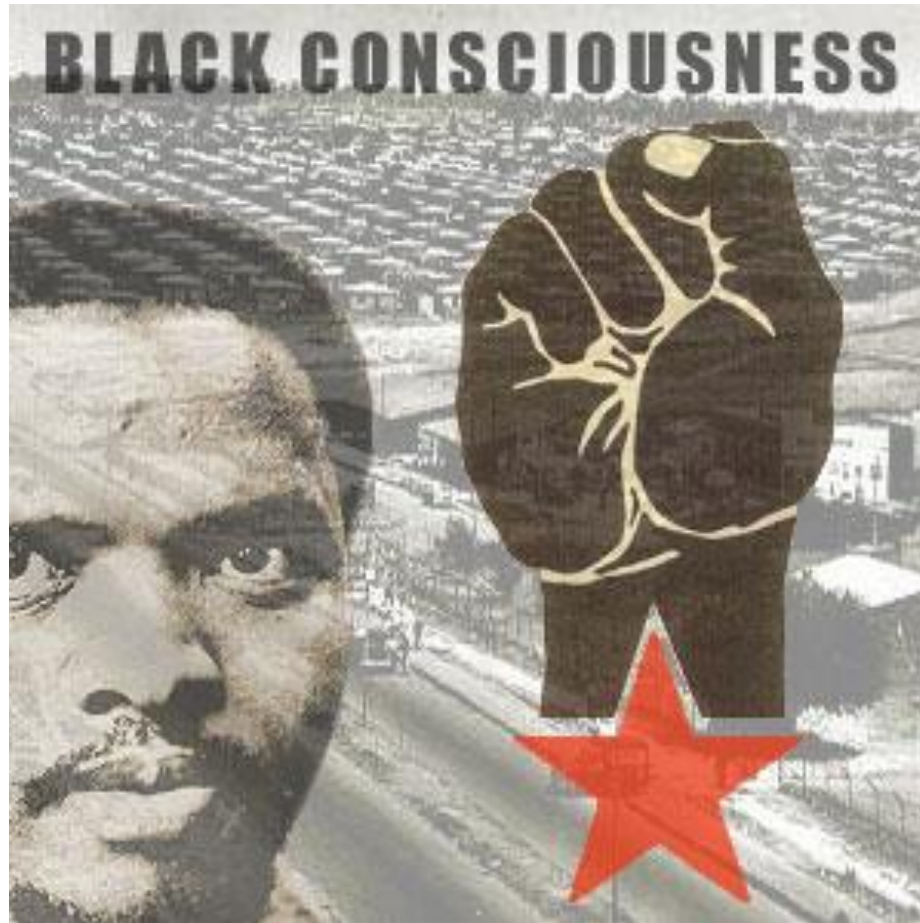


Black Consciousness in South Africa 1960s - 1970s



Overview: Exam Guidelines

- Changes that occurred in South Africa in the early 1970s
- Aims of Black Consciousness
- Role of Steve Biko in the Black Consciousness Movement
- Expression of Black Consciousness in South Africa
- Impact of the philosophy of BCM on student movements
- Reasons for the 1976 Soweto Uprisings
- Impact of the Soweto Uprising
- Reaction of the apartheid state to the Black Consciousness Movement and Steve Biko
- Impact of BCM and Biko on South African politics

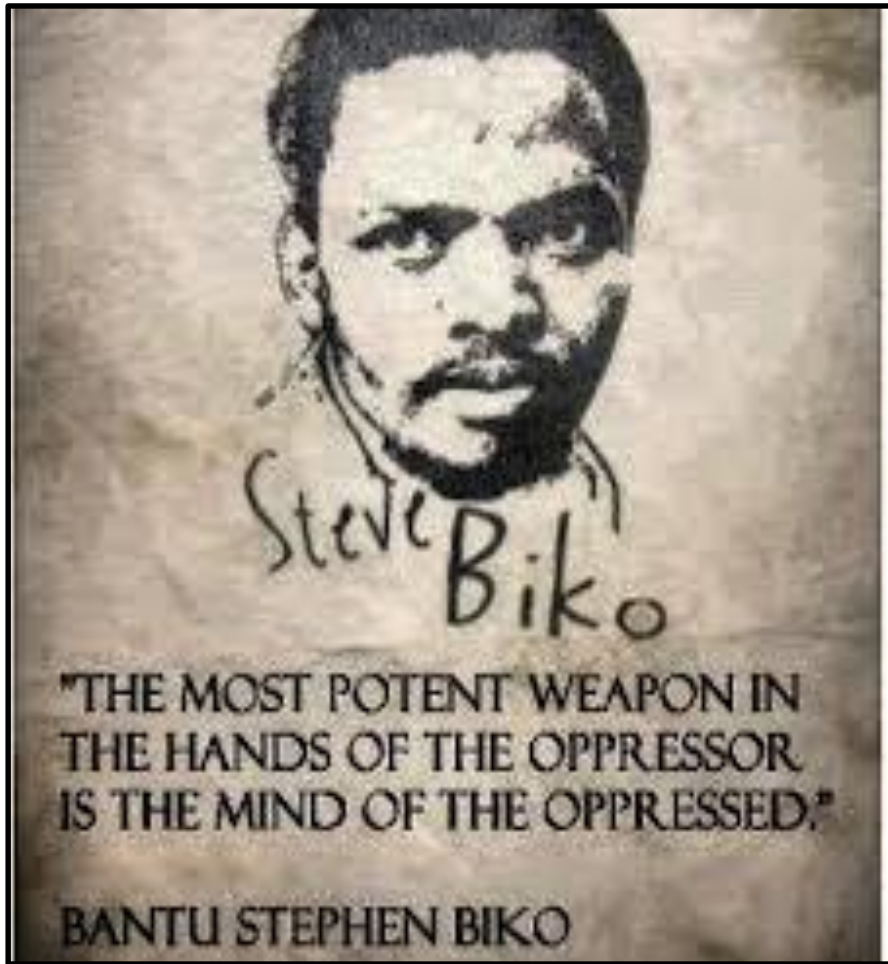
Definitions (1)

- **Civil protest** : opposition (usually to government policy) by ordinary citizens of a country.
- **Black Consciousness** : An awareness of and pride in one's identity as a black person to encourage black people to unite and take action to achieve their freedom (Early leaders included Steve Biko, Barney Pitsoana, Mapetla Mohapi)
- **Rolling Mass Action**: On-going co-ordinated resistance campaign to keep pressure on National Party government (Initiated by the ANC after the Boipatong massacre in June 1992 which continued until NP signed the 'Record of Understanding' in Nov 1992.)
- **Ideology**: A belief system. A set of ideas which shape your actions.

Definitions (2)

- **Uprising** : A mass opposition and resistance to a government or policy
- **Bantu Homelands** Regions identified under Apartheid as being the 'homelands' of different language and cultural groups. Policy intended that all Black people should ultimately become 'citizens' of these areas and NOT south Africans.
- **Tri-cameral parliament**: a three-chambered parliamentary system introduced by the national party in 1983, representing only Whites, coloured and Indians (The African majority was excluded)
- **Resistance**: when a group (or sometimes a person) works against domination.

South Africa in the 1960s



- **Very little protest in South Africa in the mid 1960s due to state repression:**
 - After Sharpeville (1960), ANC and PAC banned
 - Key members of the liberation movement were imprisoned or went into exile
 - New legislation increased the Apartheid state's power to suppress protest (eg detention without trial, house arrest)
 - Increasing militarization of state
 - Armed wings of ANC and PAC curbed by state
 - **But in late 1960s: Emergence of new form of protest**
 - = **Black Consciousness**

South Africa in the 1960s

- After Sharpeville there was a move to speed up the process of separate development.
- Each African Language group would have a 'homeland' and eventually the trappings of independence – including universities.
- The result was that in the late 1960s the numbers of young black people with access to university education grew dramatically.

Why was Black Consciousness necessary by late 1960s?

- ‘Divide and Rule’ Policy: The Apartheid government created of ‘homelands’ for different African language groups and their urban planning policies (which divided townships into different language groups) aimed to divide black people, to prevent them uniting as black people to resist Apartheid.
- The Apartheid government tried to push a policy of ‘separate but equal’ and of ‘separate development’.
- Steve Biko believed it was essential to strip away the language of ‘separate development’ and see Apartheid for what it was - a racist policy which oppressed black people because of their colour.

The philosophy and aims of Black Consciousness (BC)

- BC started as an attitude of mind rather than a political movement.
- It defined as 'black' all those oppressed by Apartheid.
- BC aimed to raise black confidence to bring about liberation.
- Promote pride in black identity, culture and history.
- Challenged white 'liberals'.
- Promoted black unity.



Biko's definition of Black consciousness.

- “Black Consciousness is in essence the realisation by the black man of the need to rally together with his brothers around the cause of their oppression - the blackness of their skin - and to operate as a group in order to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude. It seeks to demonstrate the lie that black is an aberration [deviation] from the "normal" which is white.”

Aims of BCM - in Biko's words

- “It [BCM] seeks to infuse [fill] the black community with a new-found pride in themselves, their efforts, their value systems, their culture, their religion and their outlook to life. Blacks no longer seek to reform the system because so doing implies acceptance of the major points around which the system revolves. Blacks are out to completely transform the system and to make of it what they wish. Such a major undertaking can only be realised in an atmosphere where people are convinced of the truth inherent [inborn] in their stand.”
- “Liberation therefore is of paramount [vital] importance in the concept of Black Consciousness, for we cannot be conscious of ourselves and yet remain in bondage [slavery]. We want to attain the envisioned self which is a free self. Black Consciousness is an attitude of the mind and a way of life... The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed.”

1968: Establishment of South African Student Organisation. Led by Steve Biko

July 1971 SASO's Policy Manifesto stated:

- i) "BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS" is an attitude of mind, a way of life;
- ii) The basic tenet of Black Consciousness is that the Blackman must reject all value systems that seek to make him a foreigner in the country of his birth and reduce his basic dignity;
- iii) The Blackman must build up his own value systems, see himself as self-defined and not as defined by others."

BC Movement influenced by:



Internationally

- Africanist views of Congress Youth League and PAC
- Black Power in USA
- International youth revolt of 1960s
- Independence movement in Africa
- Growing international criticism of SA

BCM : Students – Workers - Communities



- 1972: SASO established Black People's Convention (BPC), which included:
- South African Students' Movement (SASM)
 - SASM would play an important role in Soweto uprising
- Black Allied Workers' Union
- Black Communities Project
 - economic cooperatives, literacy campaigns, health projects, cultural forums

National Party government's response to Black Consciousness:

- Government welcomed BCM it at first. It saw it as fitting in with policy of 'separate development'.
- But Biko was highly articulate and his support was growing. He was clearly not going to be easily bought off or controlled by Apartheid regime.
- Government increased its policy of repression: expulsions, arrests, bannings (Biko was placed under house arrest in Kingwilliam's Town)
- In 1977 Biko was killed while in police custody and BC organisations were banned.

Changes in South Africa in early 1970s



- Time of rising tensions and crucial changes:
- Increasing dissatisfaction among township residents (result of urbanization and housing shortages)
- 1973: World oil crisis ► negative effects on SA
- Shortage of skilled labour (result of Bantu Education)

- 1973: Series of strikes in Durban and East Rand
 - greater confidence among black workers + (by 1979 led to legal recognition of black trade unions)
- 1975: Independence in Mozambique and Angola
 - Victory for liberation movements against Portuguese rule
 - ANC and PAC could establish bases close to SA
 - Hope of liberation for black South Africans



Causes of the 1976 Soweto student protests

- System of Bantu Education:
- Aimed to prepare black people for unskilled labour
- Schools poorly equipped; teachers inadequately trained; results poor; high drop-out rates
- Government spent far less on black education



The language issue:



- 1975: Government decided to enforce Afrikaans language policy
 - half subjects to be taught in Afrikaans
 - Effects of policy: major difficulties for teachers and students
 - Objections from principals, teachers, parents ignored
 - Teachers fired for not applying policy
 - Students began boycott of classes

The impact of the philosophy of BCM on student movements.



- **South African Students' Movement (SASM)** was established for school students – it was inspired by Biko and the BC philosophy:
- Spread ideas of Black Consciousness through meetings, newspaper
- Growing support among students in Soweto
 - Government banned newspaper, imprisoned or banned leaders
- 1976: SASM supported students boycotts
 - Formed Soweto Students' Representative Council (SSRC)
 - Planned mass demonstration for 16 June 1976

1976 Soweto uprising – a Turning Point in SA History



**Student Protests against
Education Policy which
began on June 16 1976**

- ▶ **became uprising
against apartheid
regime and oppression**



The events of June 16 1976

- 16 June: March of students carrying placards (eg 'Down with Afrikaans')
- Marchers gathered at Orlando stadium in Soweto
- Mood of excitement, expectation – not anger, confrontation
- Confronted by police, using teargas, bullets, shootings
- Wave of violent protest actions: barricades, stonings, arson, killing, rioting

Further harsh police actions

- Countrywide protests:
- Involvement of whole communities
- Formation of Black Parents' Association
- Forms of protest: boycotts, clashes with police, destruction of property, community stayaways

Impact of the protests and the Soweto uprising

Disruption of education:

- Government backed down on language policy
- But schooling disrupted until following year

State reaction:

- Student leaders detained; 1000+ killed; thousands wounded

Increased support for armed struggle:

- Links between student protesters and ANC
- Thousands fled country and joined ANC and PAC in exile
- Armed struggle increased with new recruits

Negative effect on SA's image:

- International criticism increased
- Destroyed attempts by government to end isolation
- Business leaders put pressure on government to reform

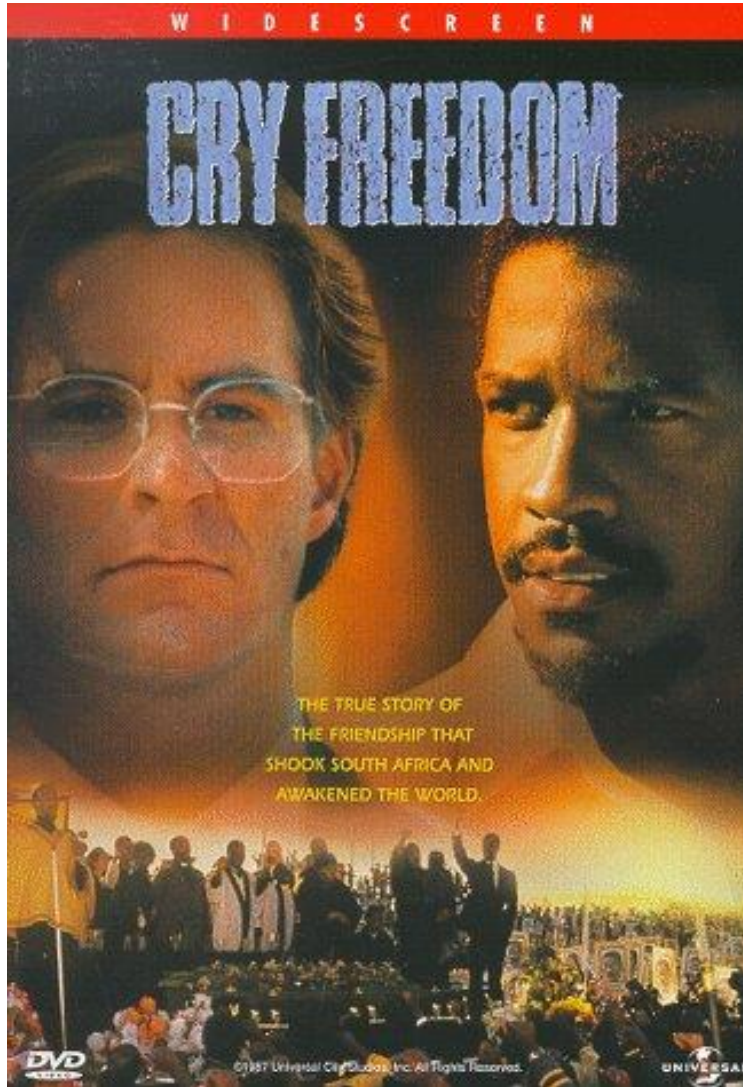
Further repression of opposition:

- 1977: 17 anti-apartheid organizations with links to Black Consciousness banned (eg SASO, SASM, BPC, SSRC)
- Steve Biko killed in police detention

Organisations banned on 19 October 1977

- **Black People's Convention (BPC)**
- **South African Students' Organisation (SASO)**
- **South African Students' Movement (SASM)**
- **Union of Black Journalists**
- **Black Community Programmes Limited (BCP)**
- **Black Parents' Association (BPA)**
- **Border Youth Organisation**
- **Soweto Students' Representative Council (SSRC)**
- **African Social Education and Cultural Education (ASSECA)**
- **Black Women's Federation**
- **National Youth Organisation**
- **Eastern Province Youth Organisation**
- **Medupe Writers' Association**
- **Natal Youth Organisation**
- **Transvaal Youth Organisation**
- **Western Cape Youth Organisation**
- **Zimele Trust Fund**
- **Siyazinceda Trust Fund**

Cry Freedom



- This Hollywood blockbuster gives students a good idea of the historical context of mid-1970s south Africa. It also uses many of Biko's writings as Biko explains his philosophy to white liberal and journalist Donald Woods.