

## The Film: “*Cry Freedom*”

“*Cry Freedom*” is a film produced in 1987 by Richard Attenborough and stars Kevin Kline and Denzel Washington: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cry\\_Freedom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cry_Freedom). This film shows the development of Apartheid some 25 years after the concluding scenes of “*Power of One*.” It is about the intertwined lives of Donald Woods (*Kline*), a newspaper editor in the city of East London (Eastern Cape Province): [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donald\\_Woods](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donald_Woods), and Steve Biko (*Washington*) one of the leading freedom fighters in South Africa during the 1970’s: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steven\\_Biko](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steven_Biko). Biko was a courageous and outspoken Black anti-apartheid activist, who was a founder of the *Black Consciousness Movement* in South Africa in 1969. He gave up medical training to devote himself to the struggle of Blacks in South Africa. Donald Woods was chief editor at the liberal newspaper, the Daily Dispatch. He had initially written several editorials critical of the views of Steve Biko. But after having met him for the first time, he changed his views. Donald Woods and his wife Wendy got to know Biko quite well, and this meant that the Woods family got special attention from the South African security police (BOSS). During this time Biko was “banned” and restricted to his home in King William’s Town. During a clandestine trip to Cape Town in 1977, Biko was arrested at a road block and brought to the city of Port Elizabeth, where was beaten to death by police. Woods was shocked and appalled by Biko's murder and was determined that the truth about Biko became known to the world; Woods started on a book. But the only way to get it published was for Woods to smuggle it out of the country. This was accomplished after a long chase scene in which the family escaped to Lesotho with Woods traveling separately, disguised as a priest. Washington was nominated for an Academy Award for his portrayal of Biko in the film. In the film Biko is romantically linked with, Mamphela Ramphele, who was pregnant with his child at the time of his death [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mamphela\\_Ramphele](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mamphela_Ramphele) Ramphele went on to complete a Ph.D. in Anthropology and became Head (Vice Chancellor) of the University of Cape Town in 1996, and is currently a Managing Director of the World Bank.

Donald Woods’ book “*Biko*” was published in 1978 in the UK, and is now a classic. The film “*Cry Freedom*”, particularly the scenes of schoolchildren uprising in Soweto (1976), packs a powerful emotional punch. The film is based on Woods’ autobiography “*Asking for Trouble: Autobiography of a Banned Journalist*” and his book “*Biko*” and is thus very much told from the perspective of a white. After his escape from South Africa, Woods and his family remained in exile in London, UK. There he wrote other books including: “*In Black and White: Voices of Apartheid*”, “*South African Dispatches: Letters to my Countrymen*” and “*Apartheid*.” Woods first returned to South Africa in 1990, after 13 years in exile, during the transition to majority rule government. He published the book “*Rainbow Nation Revisited*” in 2000, which came out in paperback in 2004. Donald Woods died in 2001 from cancer at the age of 67.

Another, related film is “*Biko: Breaking the Silence*.” This is a documentary filmed at the same time as Attenborough’s *Cry Freedom*. It discusses the making of Attenborough’s films but focuses on Biko, tracing the rise of the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa from the 1960’s, to its relevance in 1987 to the South African politics of resistance-to-apartheid. Interviews with Donald Woods and Richard Attenborough are included in the documentary. That film is in the UConn library to view.