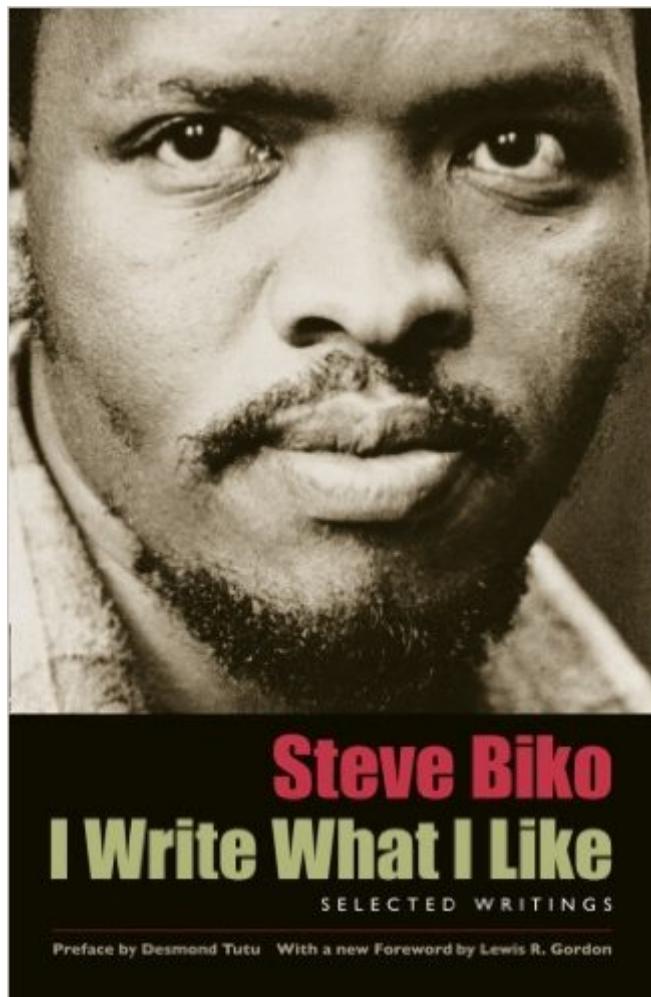


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I Write What I Like: Selected Writings



Synopsis

"The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed." Like all of Steve Biko's writings, those words testify to the passion, courage, and keen insight that made him one of the most powerful figures in South Africa's struggle against apartheid. They also reflect his conviction that black people in South Africa could not be liberated until they united to break their chains of servitude, a key tenet of the Black Consciousness movement that he helped found. *I Write What I Like* contains a selection of Biko's writings from 1969, when he became the president of the South African Students' Organization, to 1972, when he was prohibited from publishing. The collection also includes a preface by Archbishop Desmond Tutu; an introduction by Malusi and Thoko Mpumlwana, who were both involved with Biko in the Black Consciousness movement; a memoir of Biko by Father Aelred Stubbs, his longtime pastor and friend; and a new foreword by Professor Lewis Gordon. Biko's writings will inspire and educate anyone concerned with issues of racism, postcolonialism, and black nationalism.

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Customer Reviews

"*I Write What I Like*" was set on the backdrop of the thankfully defunct system of apartheid, but the parallels to our modern world remain both pertinent and poignant. While activists such as Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela fought apartheid on the political and economic front, Steve Biko fought it on the most basic psychological level. He rejected the fundamental premise that made racism and subsequent apartheid possible. The premise he rejected was "that one kind of man was superior to

another kind of man". The questions he posed and the answers he gave made him the most dangerous man alive to the white minority government of South Africa. The movement Steve Biko helped found was called "Black Consciousness". Many decried it as a form of afro-centric racism. That characterization could not have been further from the truth. Black Consciousness differed sharply from other anti-apartheid movements in that it advocated the preservation and advancement of black culture from the individual level. Far from being reveres-apartheid, Biko called for blacks to have their own institutions, their own achievements, and preserve their own languages and cultural heritage - not to the exclusion of whites but with a clear assertion that their culture was valid, valuable and should be allowed to thrive and grow. Biko asked the questions that were too hard to answer for their simplicity. "How can one prevent the lose of respect between child and parent when the child is taught by his know-all white tutors to disregard his family teachings? Who can resist losing respect for his tradition when in school his whole cultural background is summed up in one word - barbarism?" Blacks struggling for equality in South Africa were labeled "terrorists" by the white minority government.

As a clear formulator of a useful, modern, Black Consciousness for South Africans, Biko is unimpeachable - his criticism of liberal whites is fundamentally sound, that a racist system, in its import, taints the actions of everyone who works within the system as racist. Biko is working out the nuts and bolts of his theory of African advancement and affirmation while working on the front lines of the struggle. The intensity of the struggle is captivating, because the risks are great and violence is imminent - but Biko should also be captivating because of what he represents as a modern, critical African intellectual. Criticizing Biko is hard because he was clearly interested, above all, in changing his own people's view of themselves, and re-instilling their necessary sense of self worth. How important to Biko is the cynicism of liberal whites in the present political culture that blacks "may not be doing a good job leading" (xxii)? Is his preferred, future "non-racial" South Africa something that other black leaders sympathize with? I think that we can link his popularity among young blacks in the apartheid state with a new will to participate in the struggle. Because Biko was so courageous, it is perhaps a hard to get a clear idea of what he saw as the possible end games to the struggle. This book is non-rhetorical and pragmatic, and the fact that Biko's conception of, and motivation of countless blacks in South Africa around, the idea of Black Consciousness make what Biko is talking about here successfully revolutionary.

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