Summary

Creator: Biko, Steve, 1946-1977

Title: Bantu Stephen Biko letters

Date: 1973 - 1977

Size: 0.01 linear feet (1 folder)


Abstract: A rare collection of 12 typed letters signed by Steve Biko, written to the Chief Magistrate of King William's Town between May 16, 1973 and July 19, 1977, just weeks before Biko's death in police custody. The collection also includes 9 carbon copy responses/handwritten memos from the magistrate relating to Biko's requests. This collection of letters shows an increasingly exasperated Biko bravely challenging the petty demands of the apartheid regime.

Access: Some collections held by the Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture are held off-site and must be requested in advance. Please check the collection records in the NYPL's online catalog for detailed location information. To request access to materials in the Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, please visit: http://archives.nypl.org/divisions/scm/request_access

Preferred citation: [Item], Bantu Stephen Biko letters, Sc MG 963, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library

Language of the Material: English


Creator History

Bantu Stephen Biko was an anti-Apartheid activist and founder of the South African Students' Organisation (SASO), as well as a leader in the Black Consciousness movement in South Africa. He was born in Tarkastad, South Africa on December 18, 1946; the third of four children born to Mzingaye Mathew Biko and Alice 'Mamacete' Biko. Biko's life's work was to awaken the people: first from their own
psychological oppression through recognizing their inferiority complex and restoring their self-worth, dignity, pride and identity; secondly, from the mental and physical oppression of living in a white racist society. In order to deal with activists, critics, and political opponents of the Apartheid regime, the white South African government began to issue banning orders to punish and disperse the leadership of the Black Consciousness Movement. Banning was an extreme form of restriction, where an individual's movement was confined to a specific magisterial district. The harsh aspects of banning prevented one from entering institutions of learning, from talking to or interacting with the press, from publishing, and from attending gatherings of any kind. Individuals who received banning orders were in charge of their own imprisonment. If they failed to adhere to the guidelines of their bannings, they were subject to further punishment and imprisonment by the Security Police of South Africa. In 1973, Biko was 26 years old when he was banned to his mother's residence in King William's Town. In 1977, Biko was arrested for travelling outside of his magisterial district to Cape Town. He was killed while in police custody on September 12, 1977.

Scope and Content Note

A rare collection of 12 typed letters signed by Steve Biko, written to the Chief Magistrate of King William's Town between May 16, 1973 and July 19, 1977, just weeks before Biko's death in police custody. The collection also includes 9 carbon copy responses/handwritten memos from the magistrate relating to Biko's requests. This collection of letters shows an increasingly exasperated Biko bravely challenging the petty demands of the apartheid regime.

Arrangement: The Bantu Stephen Biko letters collection is comprised of 21 letters and is arranged in two sub-series: Letters from Bantu Stephen Biko (12) and Letters to Bantu Stephen Biko (9).

Key Terms

Subjects
Anti-apartheid movements -- South Africa
Apartheid -- Law and legislation
Black nationalism -- South Africa
Blacks -- South Africa -- Politics and government
National liberation movements -- South Africa
Political prisoners -- South Africa

Geographic Names
South Africa -- Race relations

Names
Biko, Steve, 1946-1977
Container List

Letters from Bantu Stephen Biko

f. 1  Letter to Chief Magistrate 16 May 1973
f. 1  Letter to The Chief Magistrate 6 December 1973
f. 1  Letter to The Magistrate 13 March 1974
f. 1  Letter to Mr. F. R. de Villiers, Magistrate 13 March 1974
f. 1  Letter to Mr. F. R. de Villiers, Magistrate 13 March 1974
f. 1  Letter to the Principal Magistrate 8 April 1976
f. 1  Letter to The Magistrate 20 April 1976
f. 1  Letter to The Principal Magistrate 23 April 1976
f. 1  Letter to The Principal Magistrate 2 March 1976
f. 1  Letter to The Principal Magistrate 4 February 1977
f. 1  Letter to The Magistrate (2 pages) 28 June 1977
f. 1  Letter to The Magistrate 19 July 1977

Letters to Bantu Stephen Biko

f. 1  Letter from Magistrate 11 December 1973
f. 1  Letter from F. R. de Villiers, Magistrate 23 July 1974
f. 1  Letter to The Officer in Charge (Security Branch) from F. R. Villiers, Magistrate 8 April 1976
   This letter is not addressed to Bantu Stephen Biko but is a cover letter from the Magistrate, F.
   R. Villiers, to the Officer in Charge. In this letter, the Magistrate makes reference to an enclosed
   copy of a letter sent by Biko.

f. 1  Handwritten note from Magistrate, King William's Town 23 April 1976
f. 1  Letter from Magistrate, King William's Town 8 February 1977
f. 1  Letter from C. P. Downing, Magistrate, to The Officer in Charge (Security Police) 28 June 1977
   This letter between the Magistrate and the Officer in Charge pertains to Biko's "application for
   relaxation restriction orders".

f. 1  Letter from Magistrate, King William's Town 12 July 1977
   Letter pertaining to Biko's "Request for Exception from Terms of Restriction Order".

f. 1  Letter from Magistrate, King William's Town, to The Officer in Charge (Security Police) 19 July 1977
   Letter regarding Biko's "Application for Relaxation of Restriction Order".

f. 1  Letter from C. P. Downing, Magistrate, King William's Town 1977 August 4