

NEWS FROM:



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7 September 2010

ALICE WALKER TO DELIVER ELEVENTH STEVE BIKO MEMORIAL LECTURE AT UCT

**18h00, Thursday, 9 September 2010, Jameson Hall, Upper Campus
Media Conference to follow speech in Ben Beinart Room, Otto Beit Building**

**Seating is limited, so please contact in advance for media accreditation:
Mologadi Makwela, 021 650 5427 (loga.makwela@uct.ac.za)**

The eleventh annual Steve Biko Memorial Lecture will be delivered at the University of Cape Town on Thursday, 9 September 2010, by Pulitzer Prize winner author, professor and activist Professor Alice Walker. Established in 2000, the lecture is the flagship programme of the Steve Biko Foundation and is the principal avenue through which the Foundation pursues a core element of its mission: to foster the intangible but essential community building blocks: history, identity, culture and values, as the foundation for leadership and agency at the level of the individual and the community.

Described as a resuscitative moment, the Steve Biko Memorial Lecture is an opportunity to explore the inextricable link between the individual and society; to explore triumphs over inequality; and to speak to contemporary challenges and opportunities facing people of African descent. Given Professor Walker's eloquent articulation of the link between identity, activism and social change, the Steve Biko Foundation is honored that she will deliver this historic address. Among those who have reflected on the life and legacy of Steve Biko through the Memorial Lecture have been some of Africa's foremost scholars, artists and religious and political leaders. They include Njabulo Ndebele, Zakes Mda, Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Mamphela Ramphele, Desmond Tutu, and then Presidents Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki, Trevor Manuel as well as Tito Mboweni.

The Eleventh Annual Steve Biko Memorial Lecture will once again be presented in partnership with the University of Cape Town. Admission to the lecture will be free and as seating will not be reserved, tickets will be allocated on a first-come first-served basis. Tickets can be collected from Wednesday, 1 September to Friday, 3 September from the Department of Communications and Marketing at UCT "Welgelegen", Chapel Road Extension, Rosebank. The office will be open from 08h00 – 16h30.

Given that this is Ms. Walker's first trip to South Africa, and the many facets of society she has touched through her work, the Steve Biko Foundation will, in addition to the Memorial Lecture, host *An Evening with Alice Walker*. Taking place at the State Theatre on the 7th of September, the event will bring together South African artists, activists and writers to celebrate the life and legacy of Bantu Stephen Biko in concert with Ms. Walker.

The 33rd Anniversary Commemoration of Bantu Stephen Biko has been assisted by our Platinum Sponsor Metropolitan Life, as well as contributions from The United States Diplomatic Mission to South Africa and the Sanlam Group.

ENDS

***For further information and to arrange interviews with the Steve Biko Foundation, please contact:
Mr Bruce Waters on 011 403 0310***

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Alice Walker, Biographical Overview

Poet, short story writer, novelist, essayist, anthologist, teacher, editor, publisher, womanist and activist, Alice Malsenior Walker was born in 1944, in the town of Ward Chapel, near Eatonton, Georgia.

As a self-described "daughter of the rural peasantry," Walker grew up in the years following the end of the Great Depression. From her parents and siblings, Walker learned to value the beauty in nature. Her family also nurtured Walker's artistic aspirations, which included painting and music. Walker was particularly close to her mother, Minnie Lou Walker, whose fearlessness, love of beauty, and legendary gardening skills are celebrated in Walker's landmark essay, "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens."

Perhaps the most shaping experience of Walker's childhood and adolescence occurred in 1952 when she was eight years old. Playing cowboys and Indians with her older brothers Curtis and Bobby, Curtis accidentally shot Walker in the eye with a BB gun. To avoid

punishment, the brothers concocted a fiction and pressured their sister to accept it. The physical result was that Walker lost the sight in her right eye, which developed a disfiguring white scar. Psychologically, Walker grew more introspective, contending with feelings of sadness, alienation, and betrayal. "An accident became," as she recalled, "'my accident'—thereby absolving my brothers of any blame."

Walker attended primary and middle school at East Putnam Consolidated, established in 1948 under the leadership of her father, Willie Lee Walker. She subsequently attended the only high school open to blacks in segregated Eatonton, Butler-Baker High, graduating in 1961 as class valedictorian. With "three magic gifts" from her mother in hand—a typewriter, a sewing machine, and a suitcase—Walker enrolled at Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1961, where she quickly became involved in the civil rights movement. With the assistance of historian Staughton Lynd, Walker transferred to Sarah Lawrence College in 1964 where her commitment to becoming a writer was nurtured by her teachers.

After graduating from Sarah Lawrence in 1965, Walker accepted a position with the New York City Department of Welfare. A year later, with a \$2,000 travel grant from the philanthropist Charles Merrill, she moved to Jackson, Mississippi, and worked for the Legal Defense Fund of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Under the supervision of lawyer and activist Marian Wright Edelman, Walker took depositions from blacks who had been evicted from their homes for attempting to register to vote.

Walker is a prolific writer in multiple genres. Her fiction, in particular her novels, have established her as a canonical figure in American letters, as well as a major figure in what scholars term the renaissance in African American women's writings of the 1970s.

In 1982 Walker published *The Color Purple*, an epistolary novel exploring the trials and triumphs of Celie, a largely unschooled, but earnest and increasingly independent young woman who unburdens herself in uncomplaining letters to God. For this achievement, Walker was awarded the 1983 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction (the first African American woman writer to receive this award) and the American Book Award.

In addition to her novels, Walker has published several volumes of poetry. As a poet, Walker treats a range of themes—freedom and individual expression, suicide, spirituality, love, ecology, civil rights—in free verse that recalls, for its spareness and lyricism, such poets as Langston Hughes, Theodore Roethke, Gwendolyn Brooks, Okot p'Bitek, and Zen Buddhist poetry

Walker is an accomplished writer of short fiction and the author of four collections of short stories. The defining characteristics of Walker's short fiction are economy, a commitment to examine rather than turn away from the troubling and violent aspects of human experience, and, above all, beautiful language and compelling storytelling.

Walker's first major work of nonfiction, written in her early twenties and published in 1967, won first prize and \$300 in a national essay contest sponsored by the American Scholar. Entitled "The Civil Rights Movement: What Good Was It?" the essay established Walker as a public intellectual and led to a writing fellowship at the prestigious MacDowell Colony in New Hampshire.

As an anthologist, Walker lifted from obscurity and honored a writer who has served as an important model in her own artistic development: Zora Neale Hurston. Walker discovered Hurston in 1970 while doing research for a story that featured voodoo practices among rural Southern blacks. The anthology also stimulated new scholarly interest in Hurston that resulted in her canonization as an American writer whose work, particularly the novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), is now widely regarded as one of the most important works of twentieth-century American literature.

As Walker honed her craft as a writer, she also held a number of teaching appointments and initiated projects that reaffirmed her commitment to writing while also enhancing her national standing. In 1968 Walker was named writer-in-residence at Mississippi's Jackson State University, and two years later she accepted the appointment of writer-in-residence at Tougaloo College. In 1972, Walker assumed a lectureship at the University of Massachusetts at Boston and Wellesley College, where she taught the first course on Black women writers. Walker returned to New York City in 1974 to become an editor at *Ms.*, thus beginning a long and vital friendship with Gloria Steinem, one of the magazine's co-founders. Wishing to support unpublished as well as emerging writers, Walker established Wild Trees Press in 1984, under whose auspices she has published such writers as J. California Cooper.

Walker's writings have been translated into more than two dozen languages, and her books have sold more than ten million copies. Along with the Pulitzer Prize and the American Book Award, Walker's awards and fellowships include a Guggenheim Fellowship and a residency at Yaddo. In 2006, Walker was honored as one of the inaugural inductees into the California Hall of Fame. In 2007, Walker appointed Emory University as the custodian of her archive, which opened to researchers and the public on April 24, 2009.