FREE SOUTH AFRICA

FREE SOUTH AFRICA

THE COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY DIVESTMENT MOVEMENT

A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

DANIEL ARMSTRONG

Daniel Armstrong®
BEHIND EVERY SUCCESS STORY IS A DREAMER

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ISBN: 9798589136838

ALSO WRITTEN BY DANIEL ARMSTRONG

How to Live Your Dreams
Find a Tree and Get Started

Live Your Dreams Now
Read About It! Write About It! And Do Something!

Unlock Students' Potential
A Blueprint for Transforming America's Schools

Find A Tree in a Nutshell
From Dreamers to Doers

“We were the first university with a significant endowment to resolve to divest its investments in companies doing business in apartheid South Africa.”

—Michael I. Sovern | President *Emeritus*
Columbia University

“The work of the Coalition for a Free South Africa is cited by many as the catalyst for campus protests around the issue of apartheid that exploded in the United States during the ’80s.”

—PBS documentary *Have You Heard from Johannesburg?*

COLUMBIA DAILY SPECTATOR
FOUNDED 1877 • INDEPENDENT SINCE 1962

Daniel Armstrong and His Flyers

By Parth Chhalbra

Daniel Armstrong, of the Columbia College class of 1984, came to Columbia to play basketball and left as the founder of the Coalition for a Free South Africa—a group that would, the year after Armstrong's graduation, famously blockade Hamilton Hall and cause Columbia to divest from companies operating in apartheid South Africa. But before that—before the blockade, before the mass student support, before the international recognition, before all that—there was only Armstrong and his flyers.

DEDICATION

In memory of President Nelson Mandela,
the leader of the worldwide anti-apartheid movement,
and to the members of the Coalition for a Free South Africa
at Columbia University, foot soldiers in the
campaign to end apartheid.

BACKGROUND

"In 1978, following widespread student unrest and Senate resolutions, the Trustees adopted a policy of limited divestment. In a statement June 6, 1978, the Trustees said Columbia would divest from companies showing 'indifference to the repressive racial policies in South Africa,' and from companies providing capital markets for the government of South Africa.

However, the Trustees chose to keep investment in companies that abide by the Sullivan principles, a set of guidelines written by human rights activist Reverend Leon Sullivan, designed to eliminate racial discrimination in companies in South Africa. In 1979, Columbia divested $2.7 million from three banks that would not agree to the Sullivan principles."

—*Columbia Daily Spectator*
March 24, 1983

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INTRODUCTION

Much has been written about the South African divestment movement that occurred at Columbia University during the 1980s. I, however, have never shared my story. As the founding chairman of the Coalition for a Free South Africa, I was there from the start.

On a personal note, the campaign transformed me from a person who entered Columbia focused on being a star on the varsity basketball team to someone who graduated focused on making a difference in the world. After graduating, the divestment campaign led me to go to the then newly independent nation of Zimbabwe for nine months to study youth development, visit apartheid South Africa, and eventually, spend time in Ghana in West Africa. While in Ghana, I met two young men who dreamed of teaching in their own school, but had no resources. I advised them to "find a tree and start their school under a tree." They took my advice and began teaching a few students math and reading under a tree. Within months, these young teachers had nearly one hundred students coming to their school under the tree. Seeing their success, a local businessman gave these resource-

ful teachers a building he owned to use as their school. This experience inspired me to create the Find A Tree program, which provides people the psychological tools to make their dreams a reality.

The divestment campaign was my first “find a tree” experience. I had a dream—Columbia divesting from corporations with operations in South Africa— and I started with what I had. What happened next not only led to Columbia divesting, but college students nationally called on their universities to divest as well.

The divestment campaign taught me the power of a dream and getting started—despite the odds, the ridicule, and lack

of resources. I hope this recollection inspires the reader to dream of a better world, craft a plan of action, and then find his or her tree and get started. This writing will recall how we realized our dream—contributing to the international call to end apartheid.

The Coalition for a Free South Africa campaign to end Columbia's ties to South Africa had four phases:

1. Raising Awareness (October 11, 1981 – March 24, 1983)
2. University Senate Resolution and Aftermath (March 25, 1982 – April 3, 1985)
3. Blockade (April 4 – 25, 1985)
4. Divestment (October 7, 1985)

During the 1984–85 academic year, I had graduated, and was not on campus. In this writing, I do not provide a description of the events and activities during the 1984–85 school year. The accounts detailing the student blockade of Hamilton Hall from April 4–25, 1985 are taken from university publications and other media.

The purpose of this document is to recall my experiences during these four phases.

—Daniel "Danny" Armstrong
Columbia College 1984
Founding Chairman,
Coalition for a Free South Africa (1981 – 1984)

THE BEGINNING

For me, the origin of the Coalition for a Free South Africa, which was initially called The Coalition for the Liberation of South Africa, began on a backyard basketball court in Compton, California, as it was there the seed was planted that apartheid had to end.

Growing up, my obsession was basketball. My dream was to play in the NBA. I spent as many waking hours as possible practicing on my backyard court. By age thirteen, my sister, Donna, was a student at Stanford University. On her weekend trips home, she often felt it was her duty to lecture me about what she had learned about apartheid in South Africa. My focus was on basketball and my jump shot. Rolling my eyes never seemed to deter my sister or discourage her from delivering one of her many lectures about apartheid. I soon realized it would be easier if I just listened. She was determined to deliver her message. My sister planted a seed.

In 6th grade, I read a book called *Foul!* by NBA legend Connie Hawkins. In his autobiography, Hawkins described New York City basketball courts as a place where ball players competed twenty-four hours a day. I knew then, I had to go to New York City. So as a high school senior, I asked my guidance counselor, “What’s

the best school in New York City?" He replied, "Columbia University...but you could never get in." I applied anyway, as this was my dream—to play basketball in the city. I was accepted as a member of the class of 1984 for the undergraduate liberal arts division of the university—Columbia College.

Eager to get my dream underway, my dad and I left for Columbia on June 21, 1980. Eight days earlier, I had graduated from high school. I was not the waiting around type. The Columbia basketball coach, Aurthur "Buddy" Mahar, arranged a summer job for me. My job was digging weeds in the median dividing traffic on Broadway. I got fired after a month for not digging fast enough. Relieved that that job was over, I called my dad to tell him I had been fired and was ready to return home for the remainder of the summer. Outraged that I got fired, he said, "Son, don't ever call here again, and don't ever ask for any more money. Goodbye." My father was not the joking type. I knew he was serious, at least until the fall when school started. For the remainder of the summer, I volunteered at the Democratic National Convention, which was held at Madison Square Garden. My focus during my freshman year was studying, basketball, and counting the days until I would go home in the spring.

In the fall of my sophomore year, I came across a flyer advertising a film on apartheid to be shown at Barnard College, Columbia's sister school, in their Altschul Hall on October 11, 1981. The flyer sparked a memory of what my sister had lectured me about years before. I attended the event. (Later, I learned that President Barack Obama, a Columbia junior at that time, also attended this event.) Following the film, David Ndaba of the African National Congress (ANC) spoke about living under apartheid

and Josh Nessen of the American Committee on Africa discussed Columbia's investments and announced an off-campus demonstration. Nessen invited audience members to meet him the following night at the law school to pick up flyers.

The next night, I joined three other students who met with Nessen to collect flyers for distribution on campus. At that point, a light had been lit in my mind—apartheid and Columbia's investments. What could be done? Something, I determined.

I began in the fall of 1981 by going to Low Library, the administrative center of the university, and reading through files regarding the anti-apartheid protests that occurred on campus during the 1970s. Additionally, I researched the realities of living under apartheid and the role divestment could play to bring about its end.

RAISING AWARENESS

The first event I organized to raise awareness on campus about apartheid was a rap session with black and white South Africans, who described their experiences growing up under apartheid. This event was held on February 11, 1982, at 9:00 pm in the Carman Hall Lounge. Approximately twenty-five students attended. This initial program was well received and it encouraged me to continue.

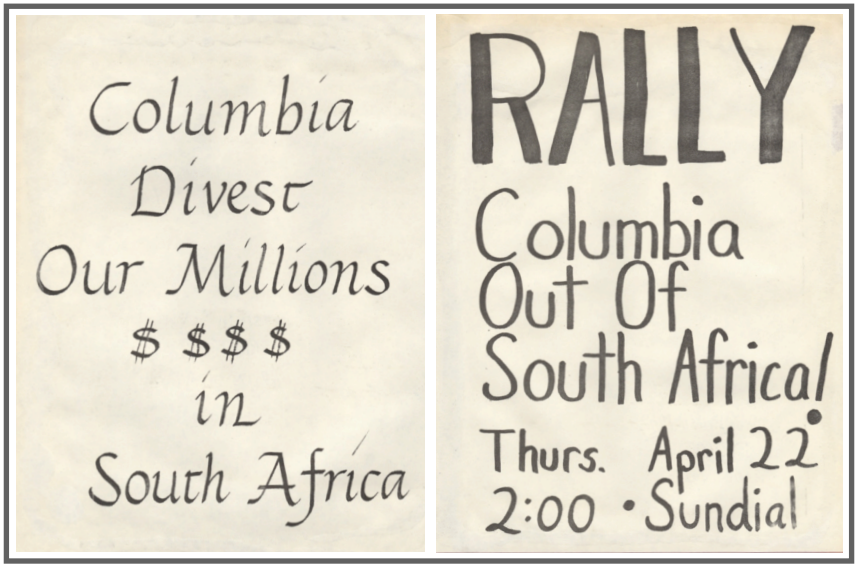
I played varsity basketball, and my teammates would often ridicule me by calling me “a radical” when I entered the locker room with a handful of flyers announcing our next event. Initially, I was self-conscious when people would see me on campus posting flyers. I saw myself as an athlete, not an activist. Students were generally not aware of apartheid and the situation in South Africa. Many had no idea where South Africa was located. I remember one student asking me, “What is the capital of Africa?” Taking a stand against apartheid and calling for divestment was controversial. In fact, taking a stand on any issue was seen as unusual in the early 1980s. The most common locker

room conversation my teammates had was about signing bonuses and investment banking jobs with Wall Street firms. “Greed is good” was the classic line from the ’80s film *Wall Street*. That line epitomized the times.

It was the time of Ronald Reagan. The Reagan administration took a direct right turn on President Carter’s emphasis on human rights in foreign policy matters. The Reagan adminis-

tration had a policy called “constructive engagement” toward South Africa. This policy essentially decreed the U.S. would continue to do business with South Africa. In fact, the Reagan administration “accidentally” sent electronic cattle batons to the South African police to be used on its black citizens. On behalf of the Coalition, I sent a letter of protest to Congressman Mervyn Dymally. America had South Africa’s back. Apartheid was not a problem. This had to change.

I determined that the best approach would be to educate students on the facts about apartheid and the role divestment could play to promote change. Informational flyers, prominent guest speakers, films, and leafleting were the central focus to raise awareness on apartheid and Columbia's investments in corporations with operations in South Africa.



We did not have personal computers for social media or smart phones to text in the early '80s. Our flyers were often handmade and posted throughout campus and on every dorm floor. My mother, a calligraphist, would write out flyers and mail them to me, after I told her what to write. Other students would offer to help hand out flyers, but my colleagues would often drift away after an event or two. I had to be the one to post flyers, reserve rooms, and organize programs. My father sent me money for necessities—books, toothpaste, and an occasional subway ride—but not for political organizing. My father insisted that I

MERVYN M. DYMALLY
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DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE
ON JUDICIARY AND EDUCATION

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

October 26, 1982

Mr. Danny Armstrong
Chairman
Coalition for a Free South Africa
Columbia College
Columbia University in the
City of New York
New York, NY 10027

Dear Mr. Armstrong:

Thank you for your letter regarding the shipment of shock batons to South Africa.

I, too, was equally appalled by this "slip-up" on the part of the Commerce Department. The fact that the United States would ship instruments that are designed to be used against people as if they were animals is repulsive.

Enclosed is a copy of a recent letter Congressman Crockett and I sent to Secretary of Commerce, Malcolm Baldridge and George Shultz, Secretary of State, expressing our outrage. Attached you will find a copy of a brief policy statement issued by the State Department pertaining to Southern Africa. I hope this is useful information.

Again, thank you for your letter. If I can be of any assistance in the future, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Mervyn M. Dymally

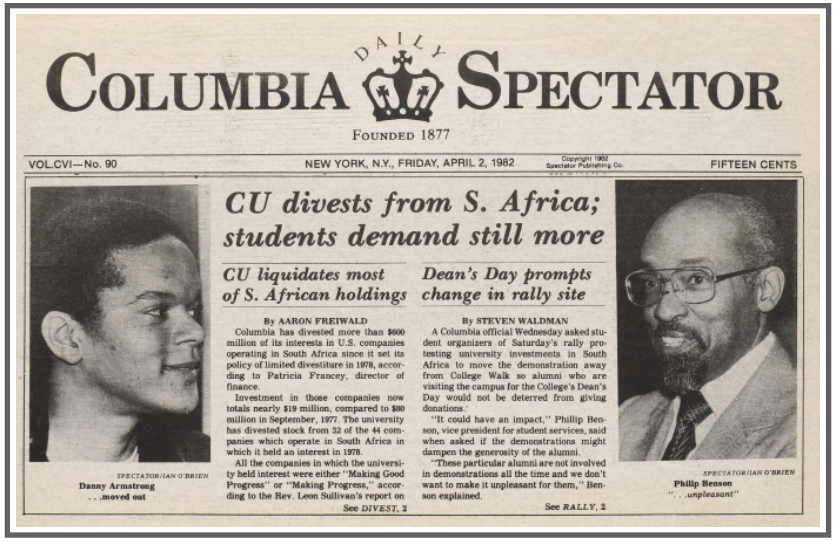
MERVYN M. DYMALLY
Member of Congress

MMD:bdk

send him a monthly financial account of my expenses. I found myself adding numerous tubes of toothpaste or an extra book or two, to hide the expenses of printing flyers and other costs.

In order to use campus facilities, the Black Students Organization sponsored or was a co-sponsor of our events. Black students knew as much about what was going on in South Africa, it seemed, as our white counterparts. I had to start with the basics in educating all students about apartheid, just as my sister had done with me years before on a basketball court in Compton.

Initially, I felt alone in moving the campaign forward. Students attended events, which was heartening. The president of the Black Students Organization (BSO), Verna Briggs, sent me a handwritten letter urging me to continue the work of raising awareness on campus. I once saw the official in charge of managing the university's investment portfolio quietly purchase a "Columbia out of South Africa" divestment T-shirt. I was the last person she wanted to see. As our eyes met, she smiled and pleaded with me not to tell that she supported divestment. Every time I felt like giving up, a stranger would approach and implore me to continue, or someone would offer to make flyers for the organization. Like undercover CIA agents conveying secret information for a clandestine operation, university staff members would discretely tell me to come to a certain building and room at an appointed time. There, they explained, would be a box with Coalition event flyers. Staff would use university copying machines and make additional flyers. These experiences encouraged me to continue to organize. Awareness was growing on campus.



DAILY

COLUMBIA SPECTATOR

FOUNDED 1877

VOL.CVI—No. 90 NEW YORK, N.Y., FRIDAY, APRIL 2, 1982 Copyright 1982 Spectator Publishing Co. FIFTEEN CENTS

CU divests from S. Africa; students demand still more

CU liquidates most of S. African holdings

By AARON FREIWALD

Columbia has divested more than $600 million of its interests in U.S. companies operating in South Africa since it set its policy of limited divestiture in 1978, according to Patricia Francey, director of finance.

Investment in those companies now totals nearly $19 million, compared to $80 million in September, 1977. The university has divested stock from 32 of the 44 companies which operate in South Africa in which it held an interest in 1978.

All the companies in which the university held interest were either "Making Good Progress" or "Making Progress," according to the Rev. Leon Sullivan's report on

See DIVEST, 2

Dean's Day prompts change in rally site

By STEVEN WALDMAN

A Columbia official Wednesday asked student organizers of Saturday's rally protesting university investments in South Africa to move the demonstration away from College Walk so alumni who are visiting the campus for the College's Dean's Day would not be deterred from giving donations.

"It could have an impact," Phillip Benson, vice president for student services, said when asked if the demonstrations might dampen the generosity of the alumni.

"These particular alumni are not involved in demonstrations all the time and we don't want to make it unpleasant for them," Benson explained.

See RALLY, 2

SPECTATOR/IAN O'BRIEN
Danny Armstrong
. . .moved out

SPECTATOR/IAN O'BRIEN
Philip Benson
". . .unpleasant"

APRIL 3, 1982 RALLY

The first Coalition rally was scheduled for April 3, 1982, on Campus Walk. I submitted the necessary paperwork on March 15. Days before the rally, I was contacted by Phillip Benson, Vice President for Student Services, and he proposed the rally date being changed given that April 3 was Dean's Day and alumni who would be solicited for donations would be visiting campus. I refused. According to the *Spectator* (April 2, 1982), "A Columbia official Wednesday asked student organizers of Saturday's rally protesting university investments in South Africa to move the demonstration away from College Walk so alumni who are visiting the campus for the College's Dean's Day would not be deterred from giving donations. 'It could have an impact,' Phillip Benson, Vice President for Student Services, said when asked if the demonstrations might dampen the generosity of the alumni. 'These particular alumni are not involved in demonstrations all the time and we don't want to

make it unpleasant for them,' Benson explained."

Ultimately, the rally was held on April 3, 1982, in Uris Plaza behind Low Library. It was a cold, rainy day. Five people attended—my cousin, who was visiting from Los Angeles, three students, and me. I gave a short speech. Despite our miniscule numbers, it seemed like the administration feared the Coalition and our message: Columbia out of South Africa. Divest now.

SANDRO PERTINI
PRESIDENT OF ITALY

On March 31, 1982, the president of Italy, Sandro Pertini, spoke at Low Library. He called on Columbia to act on the issue of human rights in South Africa as he said, "Our condemnation extends therefore to the dictatorial regimes of Latin America [and] Southern Africa...Let us register our protest from this free university." (*Spectator* April 2, 1982)

SHIRLEY CHISHOLM
U.S. CONGRESSWOMAN

The first year of activity concluded with former Brooklyn Congresswoman and 1972 U.S. presidential candidate Shirley Cisholm speaking in Ferris Booth Hall (FBH) about her experiences in South Africa as a member of a Congressional delegation. She recalled being given the title “honorary white” by the South African government in order to make the trip.

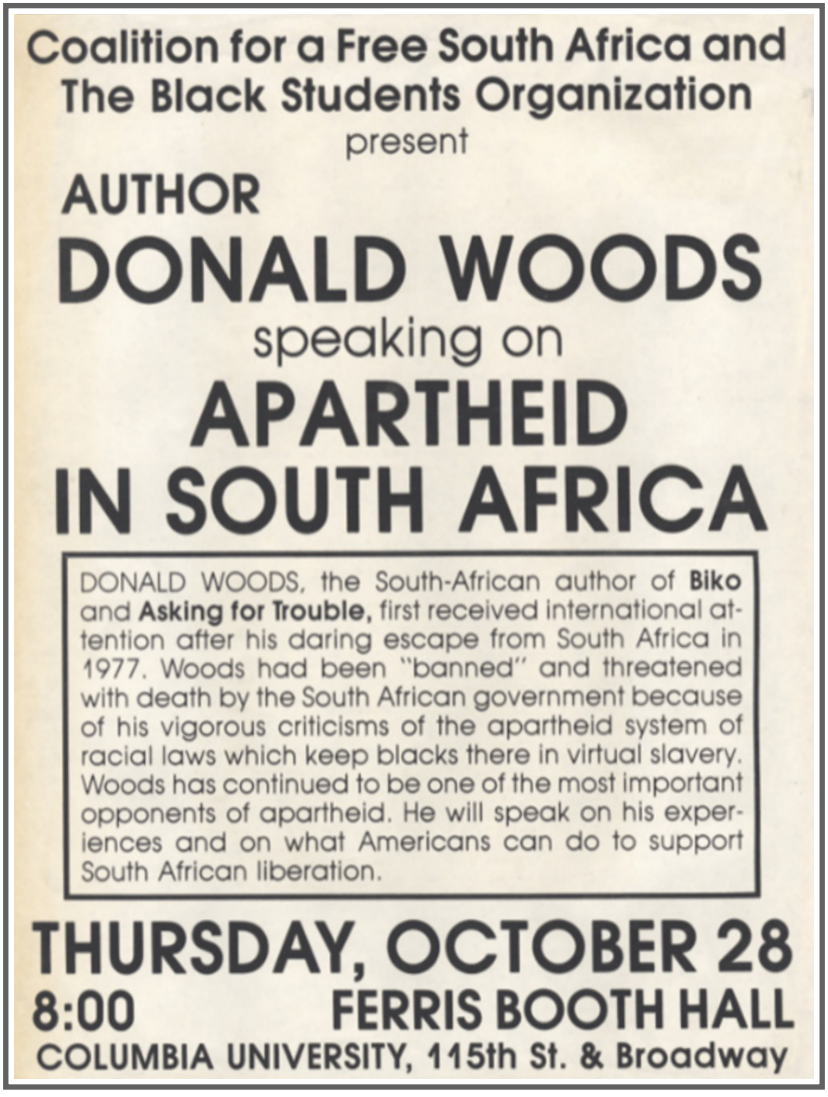
FALL OF 1982

The name of the organization was officially changed from The Coalition for the Liberation of South Africa to the Coalition for a Free South Africa and later became a registered campus organization. I had been elected director of political affairs for the Black Students Organization (BSO) the previous spring, so now I merged the political focus of BSO with the mission of the Coalition. Soon the Coalition began attracting a diverse following and became more independent of the BSO.

DONALD WOODS AUTHOR

Donald Woods, who wrote the books *Biko,* about black South African anti-apartheid activist Stephen Biko, and *Asking for Trouble,* spoke to an overflow crowd in Ferris Booth Hall on October 28, 1982. Woods, who is white, escaped from South Africa in 1977. He had been "banned" and threatened with death by the South African government because of his vigorous criticisms of the apartheid system. Woods spoke about his experiences and what Americans could to do to support change in South Africa.

Following this event, I recall thinking how my priorities had changed. In my freshman year, I would have stayed an hour after basketball practice to continue to work on my shot. On the day of the Woods event, I could not wait to get out of practice, as I had a small window of time to shower, dress, and meet Mr. Woods prior to the event. The Coalition and the campaign for divestment was becoming my priority.


Coalition for a Free South Africa and
The Black Students Organization
present
AUTHOR
DONALD WOODS
speaking on
APARTHEID
IN SOUTH AFRICA
DONALD WOODS, the South-African author of Biko and Asking for Trouble, first received international attention after his daring escape from South Africa in 1977. Woods had been "banned" and threatened with death by the South African government because of his vigorous criticisms of the apartheid system of racial laws which keep blacks there in virtual slavery. Woods has continued to be one of the most important opponents of apartheid. He will speak on his experiences and on what Americans can do to support South African liberation.
THURSDAY, OCTOBER 28
8:00 FERRIS BOOTH HALL
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY, 115th St. & Broadway

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Daniel Armstrong is a dream coach, author, and motivational speaker. He's widely recognized for his work within the American education system, providing empowerment programs to educators, administrators, and students through his Find A Tree program.

Daniel's mission is to inspire and mentor both youth and adults to pursue and actualize their dreams. Daniel Armstrong earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science from Columbia University in New York City. At Columbia, Armstrong was the founding chairman of the Coalition for a Free South Africa, an organization whose four-year campaign resulted in Columbia divesting from corporations operating in apartheid South Africa. Armstrong earned his Master's degree in Business Administration and Juris Doctorate both from UCLA. He is also a Ford Foundation Fellow, having studied youth development in Zimbabwe, where he organized a national tour by the Harlem Magicians, an American basketball team. The tour's opening night game was the largest multiracial gathering, at that point in Zimbabwe's then brief history, following twenty years of civil war.

For more information on Daniel Armstrong and his Find A Tree program, visit www.DanielArmstrong.com.

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DANIEL ARMSTRONG

From a backyard basketball court in Compton, California, to the front line of the movement to end apartheid in South Africa, Daniel Armstrong chronicles his personal experiences as collegiate athlete and political activist at Columbia University in the 1980s. His story is one of initiative, resiliency, and determination, growing from an individual voice speaking out for a noble cause into the Coalition for a Free South Africa, whose divestment campaign inspired anti-apartheid protests on college campuses across the U.S. Armstrong provides an insider's view of the years leading up to Columbia University's decision to divest funds from corporations with operations in apartheid South Africa. This inspirational story is as much an account of history as it is a testament to how one person can spark a movement that can help change the world.

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