

WELCOME TO AMERICA



the only industrialized country besides South Africa without national healthcare

DEAD ON ARRIVAL

"WE DEMAND!" the imperative of many AIDS activist fliers, was as commonplace as leaving a demonstration to visit someone's deathbed. People progressed from HIV positive to dead within six months. Our loved ones and families were sliding through our fingers. Against this backdrop, a collective response sprang up, focusing our frustration, anger and loss into demands of our government and our cultural institutions. It was the least we could do.

Established by an act of Congress in 1930 from the lab that studied the 1918 flu pandemic, the National Institute of Health's formation was a slow response to the devastation. At the turn of the century, increased international travel also increased the spread of disease. After WW II, when most European governments created programs to provide healthcare for their citizens, the United States failed to enact a comparable safety net. President Truman's proposal for a national plan was stalled by Cold War anti-communist sentiment on the one hand, and opposition from politicians unwilling to insure poor Americans on the other. During Lyndon Johnson's 1965 "War on Poverty", Medicaid and Medicare – derided by the



"We are fighting a disease, not people. The country must face this epidemic as a unified society. We must prevent the spread of AIDS while at the same time preserving our humanity and intimacy." — C. Everett Koop

C. Everett Koop's two terms as U.S. Surgeon General coincided with the rise of the AIDS epidemic in the United States, an epidemic that turned into the greatest public health catastrophe of the twentieth century. Though relegated to the sidelines of the AIDS debate during his first term, Koop fought to take a leading role in his second. In 1986, he was finally authorized to issue a Surgeon General's report on AIDS. In 1988, he mailed a congressionally mandated information brochure on AIDS to every American household. Activists were upset by his focus on gay anal intercourse as the primary conduit of the disease, while conservatives objected to the pamphlet's advocacy of condom use and its frank discussion of sexuality. His advocacy of sex education and instruction on condom use in grade school enraged religious conservatives. Koop did more than any other official in the Reagan administration to shift the terms of the public debate over AIDS away from the moral politics of homosexuality, sexual promiscuity, and intravenous drug use.

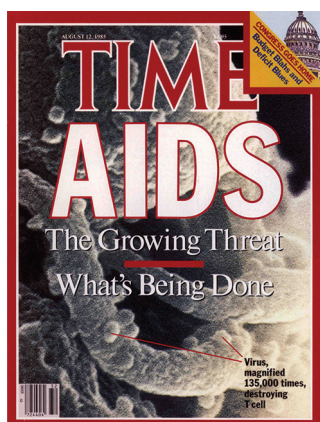
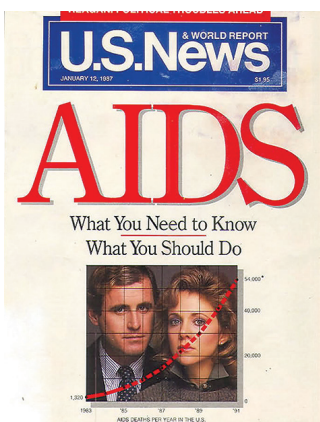
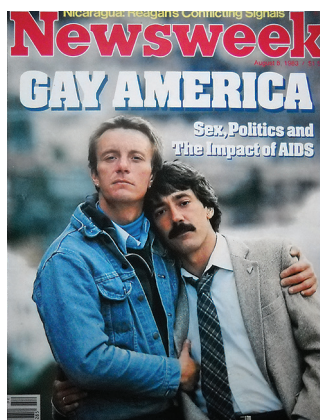
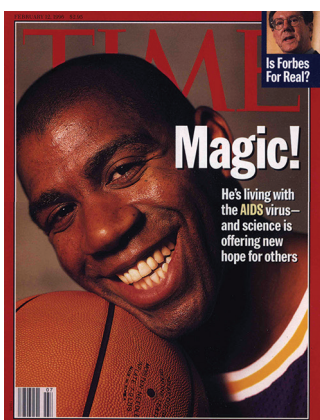
American Medical Association as "Fedicaid" – were established to provide healthcare for the poor and elderly. Many Americans were left uninsured.

Coinciding with foot-dragging by policymakers on universal health care, a system of medical coverage evolved that left too much control in the hands of for-profit corporations, and tied health insurance to employment, allowing insurers to screen out those too sick to work. When the AIDS crisis hit, the uninsured could not afford to pay for treatment, leaving them without access to care. At the same time the insured saw their premiums rise to unaffordable levels, effectively denying them insurance. Not until the passage of the Ryan White CARE Act in August of 1990 or the AIDS Drug Assistance Program did the Federal government offer funds for the care of low-income, uninsured and under-insured people with AIDS. These funds were too late, and are still too little.

Science, healthcare and politics overlapped during the formation of AIDS priorities, while race, gender, class and homophobia deeply impacted the forging of American AIDS policy. The NIH, formed to deal with just such a crisis, was tone-deaf and ineffectual during an epidemic so socially complex. Institutionally embedded pharmaceutical interests – affecting everything from choosing which drugs to prioritize in the FDA approval pipeline to which university research facilities got funding – further muddled research initiatives.

Because of the government's lack of response, community based research initiatives sprang from the most affected communities, often led by advocates with no prior medical experience. Activists trained themselves in the intricacies of treatment research, creating a generation of "citizen scientists". This treatment activism changed the face of scientific research in America and the relationship between patients and their doctors.

When *Welcome To America* was produced in 1988, the text on the billboard was accurate. Six years later, South Africa



Nelson Mandela donned an HIV Positive T-shirt in the Cape Town suburb of Khayelitsha in 2002, a very public rebuke of the denialist policies of Thabo Mbeki's government which have been linked to the deaths of over 300,000 in South Africa.

pledged to deliver healthcare to all its citizens after its transition from Apartheid. President Obama signed the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act into law in 2010, which went further than any prior legislation to close the gaps in health coverage for all Americans. However there has been a continued effort to repeal this law either in part or in full.



ALL PEOPLE WITH AIDS ARE INNOCENT



SPRING AIDS ACTION 88: Nine days of nationwide AIDS related actions & protests.

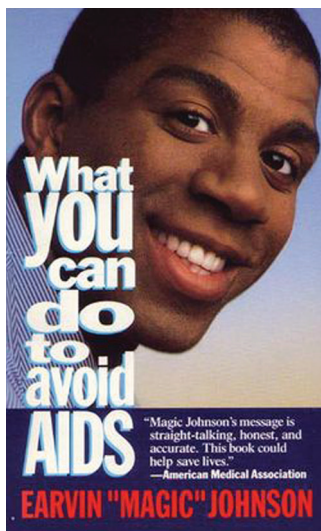
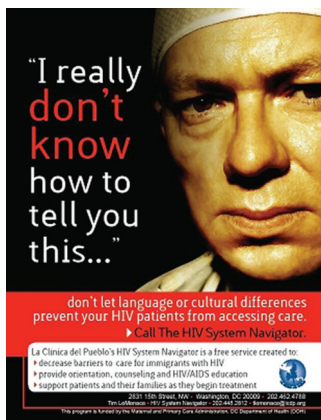
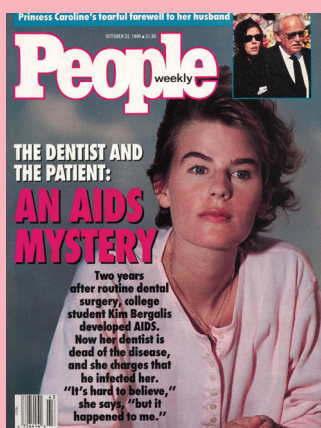
Gran Fury

INNOCENT AND GUILTY

In the first wave of public reaction to the AIDS crisis, people with AIDS were delineated—by politicians, public commentators and others—into two separate groups: “innocent victims” and “guilty carriers” of AIDS. Children who were exposed to the virus through their HIV+ mothers and hemophiliacs were innocent; those whose “lifestyle” included risky behavior which left them vulnerable to infection were not.

Gran Fury’s message *All People With AIDS are Innocent* was a direct response to this dividing line, a call to recognize that there should be no guilt associated with acquiring HIV, and that all PWAs deserved compassion. We put this out on the street as an antidote against the barrage of the hysterical imagery of the time, and in direct conversation with lurid news photos, art world portrait work or the flat-footed imperatives of public service announcements. We refused to linger on the physical signs of the disease, or to make a fetish of KS lesions or wasting.

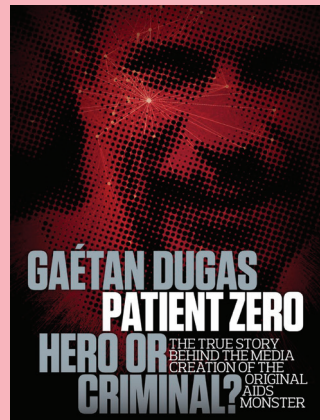
As the Eighties unfolded, public figures agreed to be photographed opportunistically cradling HIV+ babies while Princess Diana was one of the first public figures to be photographed touching an adult gay man with AIDS. These photos were transmitted around the world, and did much to begin to shift society’s feelings towards gay men. Antipathy began to be replaced by sympathy and an eventual acknowledgement that the gay community had galvanized to care for it’s own, when political and religious leaders failed or refused to do so.



Pope John Paul II embracing a child with HIV.



Alon Reininger, San Francisco USA, 1986



Kaposi Sarcoma is a rare skin cancer usually seen in elderly men of Mediterranean descent, because of the natural immunosuppression caused by aging. When young HIV+ patients appeared with the unmistakable lesions, KS became known as an AIDS defining illness. AIDS medications have made this disease, for the most part, a thing of the past in the United States.



In April, 1987, Diana, Princess of Wales, shakes hands with an AIDS patient as she opens a new AIDS ward at the Middlesex Hospital in London—and becomes the first high-profile celebrity to be photographed knowingly touching a person infected with the HIV virus.



Elizabeth Taylor testified before the Senate in 1986 to lobby for more funding and research, and also helped establish the American Foundation for AIDS Research (amfAR) and the Elizabeth Taylor AIDS Foundation. Her plea after Rock Hudson’s passing: “Please God, he did not die in vain.”



FIGHTING FOR LIFE

Rock Hudson's passing prompted the Hollywood AIDS Project to launch a campaign to raise awareness and funds for research and treatment.

By the time of his death, Hudson had been diagnosed with AIDS for several years. His death was a major blow to the gay community, and his passing was widely reported in the media.

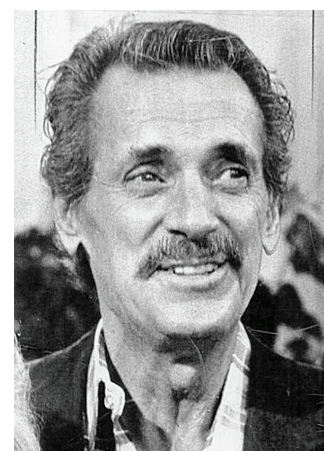
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Sharon Stone at the Academy Awards, 1992, wearing the Red Ribbon, a visual symbol to demonstrate compassion for people living with AIDS. The Red Ribbon project was created by Visual AIDS Artists Caucus, New York.



Ricky, Robert and Randy Ray were three hemophiliac brothers diagnosed with HIV in 1986. Though victorious in federal court to allow the children to attend public school despite their diagnosis, the family fled Arcadia, Florida when their home was burned down a week after the court’s decision.



Rock Hudson, 1985. When Hudson appeared at a press conference with Doris Day to announce her upcoming cable talk show, photos of the frail movie star dominated newscasts. Soon after Hudson admitted he had HIV, which became a watershed moment for public awareness.



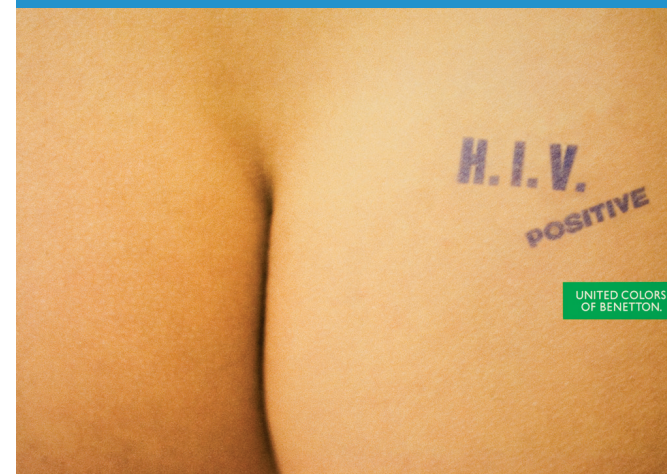
Conservative author William F. Buckley with Ronald Reagan

Excerpt from an Op-Ed for *The New York Times*, March 18, 1986:

“...But if he has AIDS, should he then be free to marry? Only after the intended spouse is advised that her intended husband has AIDS, and agrees to sterilization.”

“Everyone detected with AIDS should be tattooed in the upper forearm, to protect common-needle users, and on the buttocks, to prevent the victimization of other homosexuals.”

—William F. Buckley



Rock Hudson gets a massage at the Finlandia Baths in Hollywood, 1950. Born Harold Scherer Jr. in 1925, Hudson headed to Los Angeles in 1946, hoping to break into showbiz. By 1948 he was under the wing of talent agent Henry Wilson, the man who’d help the actor navigate his career by keeping a closely guarded secret: Hudson was gay.



Feb. 4, 1987 Liberace, the flamboyant pianist and entertainer, dies of AIDS three months after his final performance. His manager had explained away the performer’s shocking weight loss by claiming he was on a watermelon diet.



President Ronald Reagan and Nancy Reagan posing with Rock Hudson at White House State Dinner for President De La Madrid of Mexico, 1984.

KISSING DOESN'T KILL: GREED AND INDIFFERENCE DO.



CORPORATE GREED, GOVERNMENT INACTION, AND PUBLIC INDIFFERENCE MAKE AIDS A POLITICAL CRISIS.

READ MY LIPS

The early years of AIDS were marked by press reports of an epidemic fueled by gay promiscuity and fears of infection from casual contact. Panic spread about whether public bathrooms, swimming pools, mosquitoes, or even handshakes could transmit HIV, with public health authorities failing to issue clear messages.

Misinformation persisted about the presence of HIV in saliva and the threat of kissing. In 1985, when Rock Hudson was dying of AIDS, a controversy arose over his onscreen kiss with Dynasty co-star Linda Evans. Hudson was diagnosed with HIV in June, 1984 but publicly denied it, claiming he had inoperable liver cancer. He continued work on Dynasty and filmed a kissing scene without informing Evans he had HIV. When he revealed he had AIDS in July 1985, the ensuing controversy led the Screen Actors Guild to require actors to be notified in advance of open mouth kissing should they wish to decline. These incidents with Rock Hudson fanned fears that AIDS not only lurked in homosexuals, but that they might not be so easily recognizable.

President Reagan did not utter the word "AIDS" until 1986, five years after the epidemic had first been identified, while tabloid newspapers continued to sensationalize the risk of its casual spread. Against this backdrop of fear and ignorance, ACT UP organized a "Kiss In" during the spring of 1988 to show it was safe to kiss and assert positive expressions of queer sexuality.



Rock Hudson and Linda Evans kiss on Dynasty.

TOP: Kiss-In at the Republican National Convention, New Orleans, 1988
CENTER: Act Up Kiss-in, New York, 1988
BOTTOM: Act Up Kiss-in, Paris, 2008



In a 1989 episode of the popular television show *Thirty-something*, the gay friends of one of the main characters were shown in bed together after having had sex. Even though the actors were forbidden to touch each other while in bed, the controversy proved too much for five of the show's sponsors, who pulled their commercials, costing the network approximately \$1.5 million in advertising revenue.

Why We Kiss

WE KISS in an aggressive demonstration of affection. We kiss to protect the cruel and painful bigotry that affects the lives of lesbians and gay men. We kiss so that all who see us will be forced to confront their homophobia. We kiss to challenge repressive conventions that prohibit displays of love between persons of the same sex. We kiss as an affirmation of our feelings, our desires, ourselves.

In simplest terms:
Gay men and lesbians exist. We exist in all cultures. We always have, we always will. What makes us prefer same-sex sex derives from the same source that makes others prefer opposite-sex sex. We are not aberrations, abnormal, maladjusted or misopled. We are not evil; we are not a threat. We are human beings, as capable of love, compassion and all that is best in humanity as are any other human beings.

Yet the society in which we live rejects, ignores and degrades us. We are pressured to deny desire, to remain silent and invisible. Learning to accept and love ourselves in the face of so much disapproval is an uphill battle requiring courage and spirit.

If you don't think homophobia is rampant in America, consider the following:
• Many politicians consider it political death to speak out on gay and lesbian rights issues.
• One in ten lesbians and one in five gay men have been physically assaulted because of their sexuality.

• The media tend to interview us only in formats in which equal time is given to those who oppose our very existence. Imagine serious network time given to Jewish or black community leaders only when Nazi or Ku Klux Klan spokespersons were present to provide a "fair balance" of opinions.

• The Supreme Court recently upheld the Harwood decision, thereby approving a Georgia statute denying gay men and lesbians engaging in sexual activity in their own homes their constitutionally-guaranteed right to privacy.

• The Helms amendment, preventing federal funding of any AIDS educational materials that could be construed to "promote" lesbian or gay sex, passed in the senate by a vote of 96 to 2.

• The federal government has been unconscionably slow to react to the AIDS crisis, a slowness tantamount to condoning the deaths of tens of thousands of gay men.

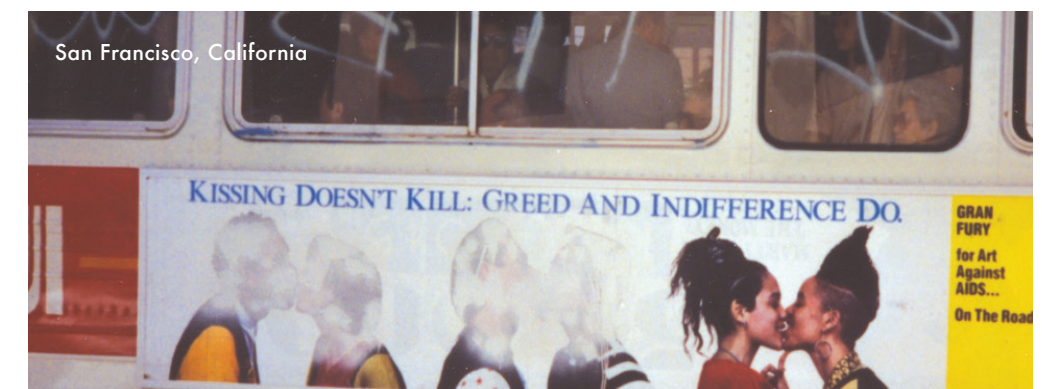
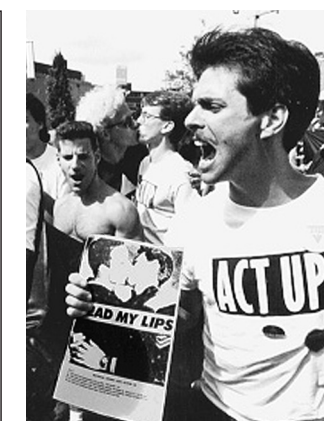
The Civil Rights Commission is opposing legislation authorizing the gathering of bias-related crime statistics because it objects to the inclusion of sexual orientation as a bias category. This is despite their own admission that crimes against gay men and women, aggravated by perceptions about AIDS, are probably the most widespread hate crimes today.

What kind of person decides another does not deserve the full scope of human rights and freedoms because of whom he or she chooses to love?
What kind of person tells another her or his love is not real?

We are striving to rid ourselves and others of the mental shackles affixed by a society that rejects same-sex affection. To do this we must acknowledge our own worth. We must refuse to be an invisible minority. We must speak up to those who casually assume we are straight and come out even to those whose rejection we fear most. We must force our presence and our values on all who have hitherto felt confident enough to regulate our very existence.

We must celebrate ourselves!

ACT UP / ACT NOW

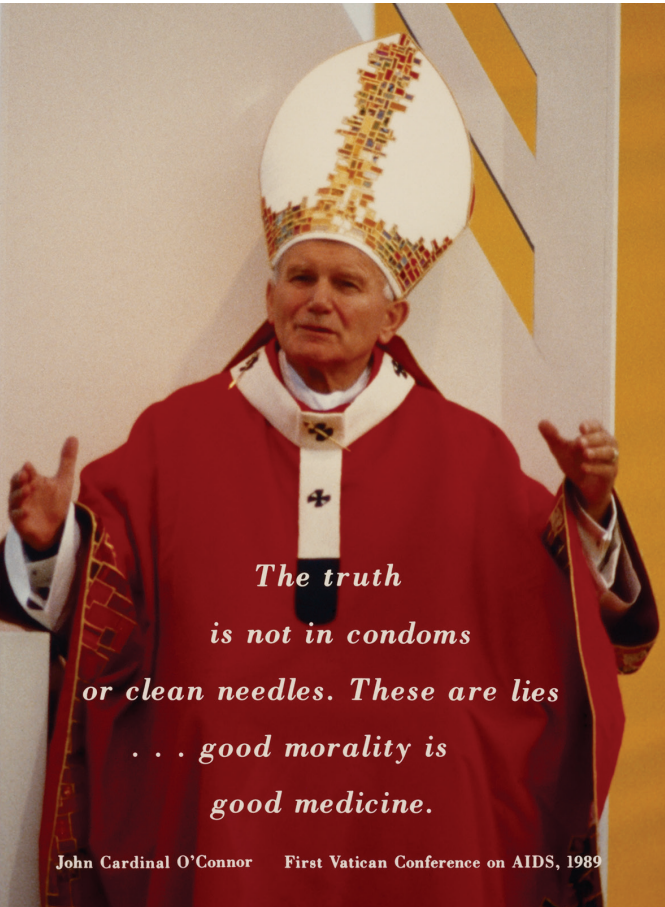


KISSING BACKLASH

In spring 1990, *Kissing Doesn't Kill* was slated to run on buses and subways in Chicago. Alderman Robert Shaw complained that the poster had nothing to do with a cure for AIDS. He argued that the Chicago Transit Authority should not promote a "particular lifestyle", and that the posters were directed at children for the purposes of "recruitment". In June 1990, the Illinois Senate barred the CTA from displaying "any poster showing or simulating physical contact or embrace in a homosexual or lesbian context where persons under twenty one could view it." The ACLU protested the bill, stating that it was unconstitutional. Concurrently, the Chicago Gay Pride parade defiantly marched with a *Kissing Doesn't Kill* banner and a "kiss-in" was organized outside the CTA. The Illinois House of Representatives defeated the "no physical embrace" bill. In August 1990, *Kissing Doesn't Kill* was belatedly installed. Rumored to have been organized by conservative religious ministers, outraged Chicagoans defaced nearly all the posters within two days.

In a lighter vein, activists fighting for lesbian visibility used used white spray paint to excise the non-lesbian kissers during the project's appearance in San Francisco.

The Catholic Church has long taught men and women to loathe their bodies and to fear their sexual natures. This particular vision of good and evil continues to bring suffering and even death. By holding medicine hostage to Catholic morality and withholding information which allows people to protect themselves and each other from acquiring the Human Immunodeficiency Virus, the Church seeks



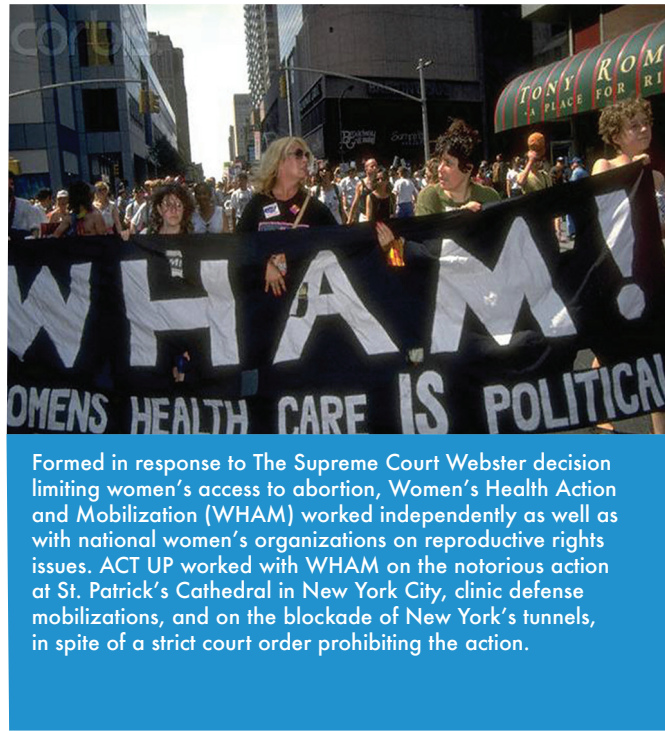
to punish all who do not share in its peculiar version of human experience and makes clear its preference for living saints and dead sinners. It is immoral to practice bad medicine. It is bad medicine to deny people information that can help end the AIDS crisis. Condoms and clean needles save lives as surely as the earth revolves around the sun. AIDS is caused by a virus and a virus has no morals.

THE POPE AND THE PENIS

In 1987, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops made a limited exemption to the Church's ban on contraception, ruling that, because of the AIDS epidemic, condoms could be used to prevent HIV infection. New York's notoriously conservative Cardinal O'Connor opposed this ruling and halted prevention education in his jurisdiction saying, "I believe the greatest damage done to persons with AIDS is done by those health care professionals who refuse to confront the moral dimensions of sexual aberrations or drug abuse." In 1989, after pressure from O'Connor and others, the bishops reversed their 1987 exemption and called for abstinence as the sole solution for HIV prevention—even in the case of married couples where one person is HIV infected. The massive 1989 "Stop The Church" protest held outside Saint Patrick's Cathedral organized by ACT UP and WHAM (Women's Health Action Mobilization) represented an emerging coalition between AIDS activists and pro-choice demonstrators, and made important connections between the Church's stand on AIDS and reproductive freedom.

Pope Benedict XVI was hardly quiet before his ascension. In a 1986 letter he proclaimed, "Although the particular inclination of the homosexual person is not a sin, it is a more or less strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil...a person engaging in homosexual behavior therefore acts immorally." In 2004 Benedict struck again with his letter on the Worthiness to Receive Holy Communion, which excluded women from taking communion who had committed the "grave sin of abortion". In January 2012, Pope Benedict said that gay marriage was one of several social ills that "undermine the family, threaten human dignity and the future of humanity itself."

While on a trip to Africa in 2012, he continued to promote abstinence as a realistic solution for AIDS prevention. The number of people living with HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa is 22.9 million, estimated to be two thirds of the global total.



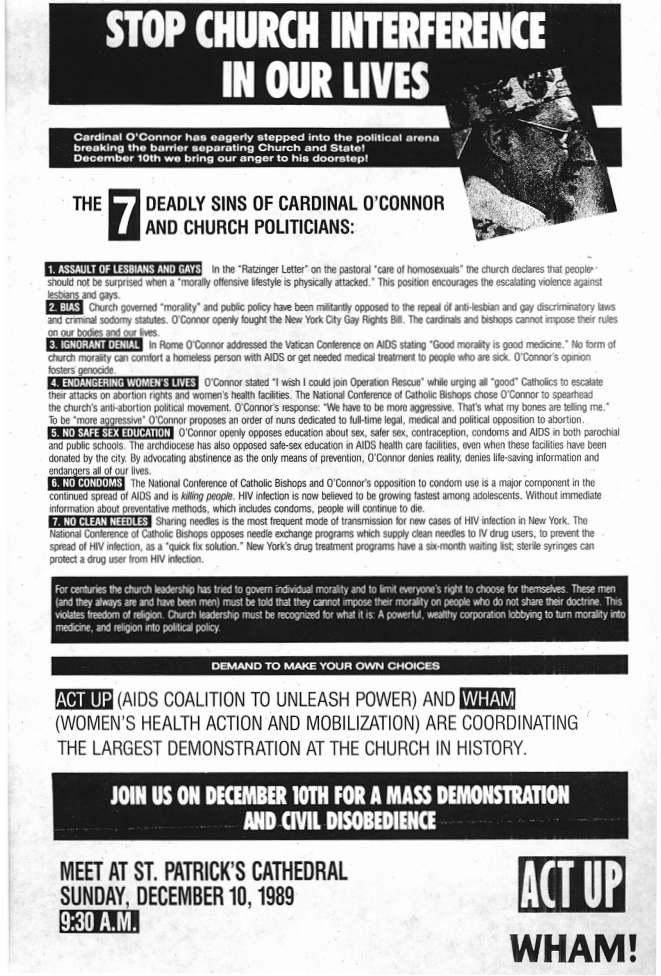
Formed in response to The Supreme Court Webster decision limiting women's access to abortion, Women's Health Action and Mobilization (WHAM) worked independently as well as with national women's organizations on reproductive rights issues. ACT UP worked with WHAM on the notorious action at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City, clinic defense mobilizations, and on the blockade of New York's tunnels, in spite of a strict court order prohibiting the action.

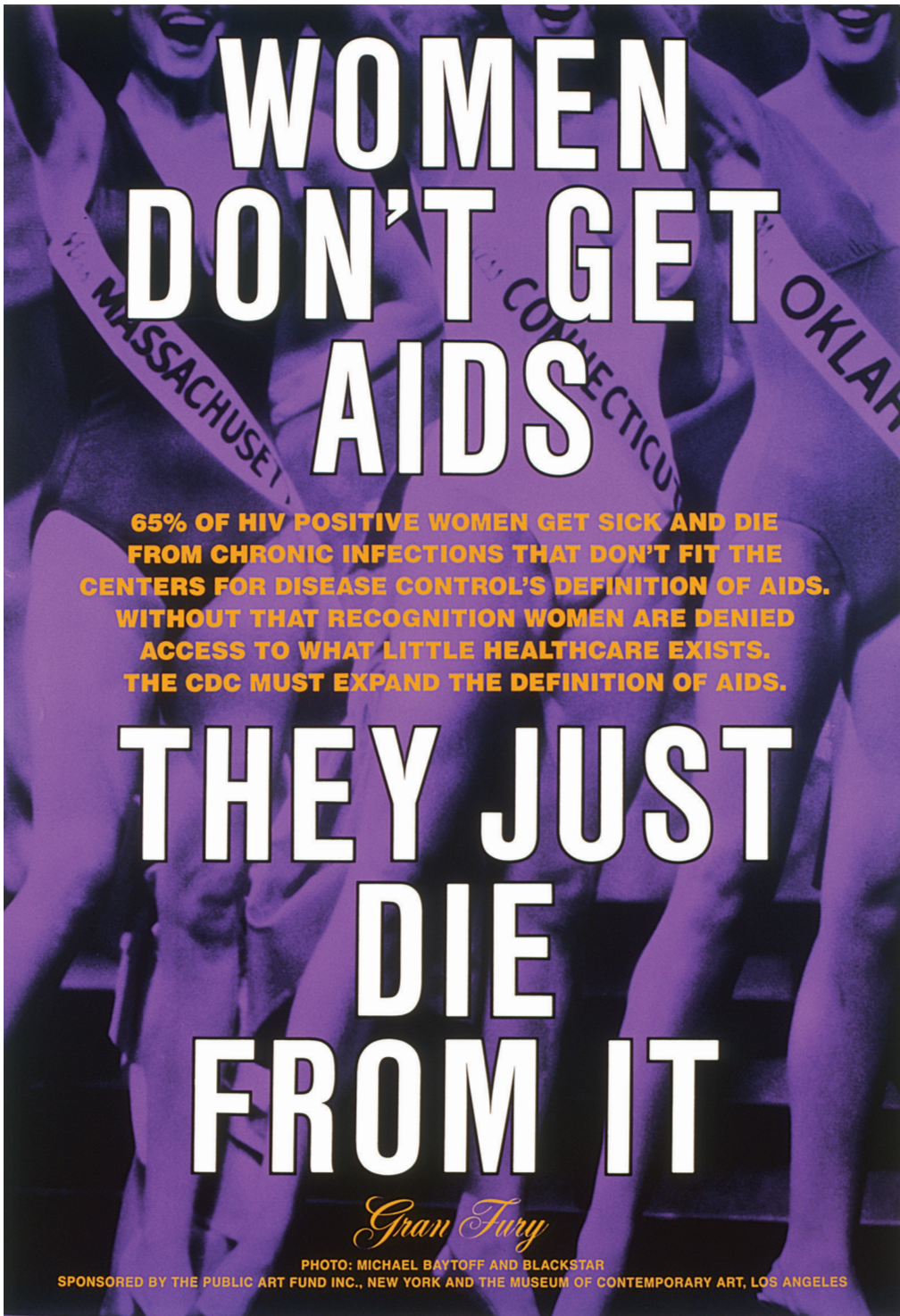


The man now known to the world as Pope Benedict XVI was born Joseph Aloisius Ratzinger. Ratzinger was a major figure on the Vatican stage for a quarter century before his papal ascension. He was the main force behind the 1986 "On The Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons", a notoriously homophobic Papal Missive written at the height of the AIDS crisis.



Pope John Paul II was born Karol Józef Wojtyła. During his twenty-six year reign he fought to uphold the Church's stance against contraception, supported the ultra-conservative Opus Dei prelature and called homosexuality an "objective disorder".

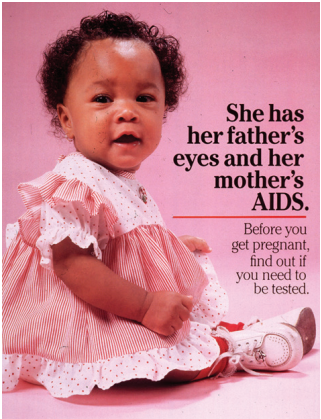




JUST DIE

Legend has it the earliest meetings of ACT UP were mostly gay men. But women were a significant presence right from the start, including those with organizing skills honed by the women's health and feminist movements—such as questioning medical authority, conducting teach-ins and civil disobedience training—all of which became foundational to the success of ACT UP. As ACT UP grew, so did its female membership, lesbian and straight, eventually leading to the formation of the Women's Committee, which spearheaded some of ACT UP's most successful campaigns.

Gran Fury's first poster, *AIDS: 1 in 61*, highlighted this under-reported statistic about infants born HIV+ and the risk for Black and Latina women in New York City, contradicting public perception that the disease was confined to homosexuals and drug users. *Men: Use Condoms or Beat It!* challenged the reluctance of many men to accept responsibility for the safety of their sexual partners. Since medical research models have always avoided female subjects, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control failed to include the diseases that affected HIV+ women in their definition of AIDS, excluding women from epidemiological surveys, obscuring their risk, and denying critical access to treatment. After a four-year pressure campaign by the ACT UP Women's Committee, the CDC expanded the definition of AIDS to include the opportunistic infections specific to women with AIDS. This allowed women P.W.A.'s not only to become eligible and receive medical treatment and benefits, but also to be counted, and to therefore allow the full scope of the pandemic to be measured.



The Women's Action Coalition (WAC) was formed in New York in 1992 to press for economic parity and representation for all women. WAC, whose membership included women from ACT UP, employed similar strategies, many of which originated in the women's health movement of the 1970s.

