

AIDS is no "ordinary" epidemic.

“More than a devastating disease, it is freighted with profound social and cultural meaning. More than a passing tragedy, it will have long-term, broad-ranging effects on personal relationships, social institutions, and cultural configurations.

AIDS is clearly affecting mortality – though in some communities more than others. It is also costly in terms of the resources – both people and money – required for research and medical care. But the effects of the epidemic extend far beyond their medical and economic costs to shape the very ways we organize our individual and collective lives.”

Milbank Quarterly's two-volume study, A Disease of society: Cultural Responses to AIDS, 1991

Vocabulary

“Outbreak”

“Epidemic”

“Pandemic”

US Culture just before the start of the AIDS epidemic (c.1975)

- Conservative revivalism in political circles.
 - ↳ Reagan elected; Carter first evangelical president

First news-making event

In 1981, a government report announced that five homosexual men had contracted what was described as an unusual form of pneumonia.

- “Gay Cancer” / “GRID” / “AIDS”

Cultural responses to AIDS

Relevance / Impact on US/Global Culture

AIDS has reshaped nearly every aspect of our society.

New aspects of law
(employment discrimination)

The public health system –
Because of the increasing concentration of the epidemic in low-income and minority communities, the public health system at the local level has become the primary service provider for a large proportion of people with HIV disease or AIDS

It prompted discussions about medical privacy.

Public policies on Children and Families

- When the HIV/AIDS epidemic began, law and policy about families and intimate relationships were in transition, as they still are, and the epidemic has raised difficult questions. For example, because AIDS can be transmitted pre-natally, public policies regarding the relationships between mothers and their fetuses and the care of sick children without maternal or family support had to be considered.
- Because HIV/AIDS often affects people living in unconventional relationships, issues of health insurance, inheritance, and housing and health decisions — which are usually linked to conventional family structures — called for reexamination.

Relevance / Impact on US/Global Culture

The correctional system

- Prisons have found it difficult to respond to the health care needs of inmates with AIDS. In most cases, funds for HIV care in prisons must come from corrections systems budgets that are already strained

HIV/AIDS challenged the public health community to set aside many of its traditional policies and practices for the containment of infectious disease. Quarantine, mass mandatory testing, and contact tracing all had notable disadvantages in dealing with a disease with a long latency period, that was spread chiefly through sexual activity or intravenous drug use, and that largely affected already stigmatized groups. Spokespersons for the affected groups advanced other methods of containment that relied on community education and voluntary anonymous testing. However, mass education and other approaches to behavior modification were already emerging as the public health strategy of choice for substance abuse prevention, smoking, and behavioral disorders. Thus, HIV/AIDS accelerated the adoption of these approaches and invited their intensive application to an infectious disease.

The disease forced us to talk about end-of-life issues.

It gave birth to patient activism

Relevance / Impact on US/Global Culture

Religion

- 1st decade: religious **viewed the epidemic as a plague consistent with their faith-based views;** included **discrimination** and charges of immorality. (“God’s will...)
- 2nd decade: some religions continue the above, but others (1) **differentiate between personal conduct which spread the virus and the virus itself,** and others (2) provide support to those affected.

Its influence can be seen in everything from television programming to song lyrics.

Clinical research and drug regulation

- The most profound change wrought by AIDS in drug development is simply the dramatic **increase in public awareness of the nature, structure, and purpose of clinical trials.** Debate about the ethics and scientific validity of clinical trials occurs not only among physicians, statisticians, and ethicists, but also among patients, activists, and politicians. AIDS has to a large degree publicized and politicized the aspects of clinical investigation
- the **interplay of politics, science, and ethics** must be recognized

Relevance / Impact on US/Global Culture

Health care finance and delivery

- The HIV/AIDS epidemic has sent more than 1 million patients into the health care system. A substantial proportion of these patients are drawn from the pool of the uninsured or patients who rapidly exhaust their insurance benefits due to job loss or benefit restrictions. The people who became HIV/AIDS patients **challenged the provider community on a number of fronts**: they were generally young and previously healthy people who engaged in life styles that affronted many in the provider community. Before the modes of transmission were well understood, many health care personnel feared contact with AIDS patients, and both hospitals and private physicians struggled with **unfamiliar problems of how to provide sensitive and responsive care while preserving the privacy** of AIDS patients and **protecting staff** and other patients from infection.
- Most visible, perhaps, has been **the conflict over access to new drugs and a "fair price" for new therapeutic agents**. The introduction of universal precautions in hospitals has significantly increased the demand for barrier protection and hence the cost of hospitalization for all patients. The HIV/AIDS epidemic has also expanded fissures already present in the health insurance system: the expense of the disease has caused insurance firms to use all available markers to avoid enrolling AIDS patients (c.2000)

Relevance / Impact on US/Global Culture

AIDS forced conversations about sexuality and homosexuality. Many believe it laid the groundwork for current debates over gay marriage and gay rights.

Volunteer organizations

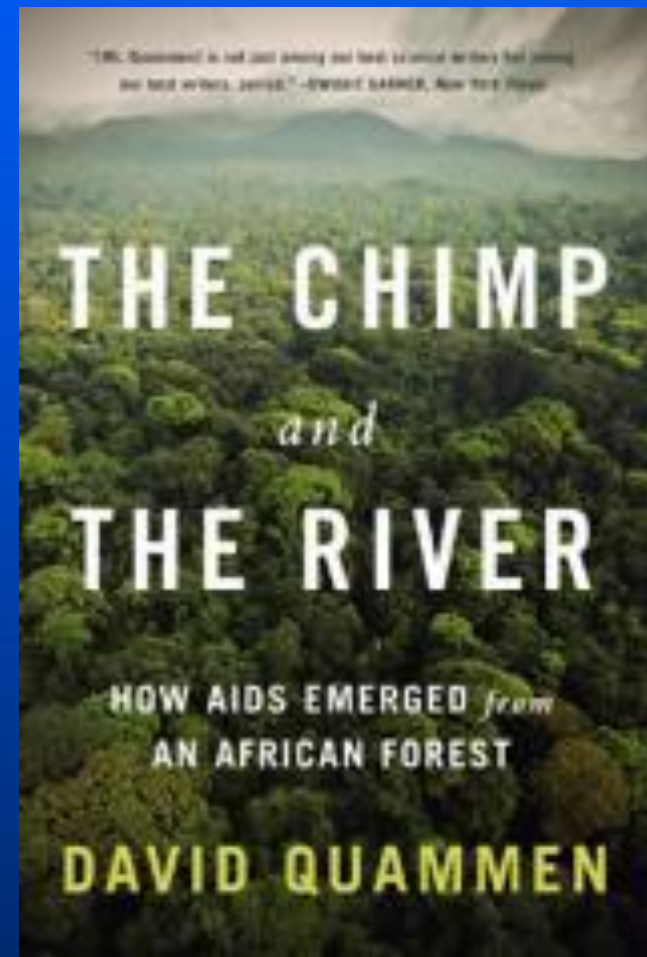
- Government at all levels was slow to respond to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The slow response was due partly to a general reduction in the growth of public spending on health care and social welfare and partly to a unique attribute of AIDS: its early association with two highly stigmatized minorities—gay men and intravenous drug users. When governments did respond, their flexibility and capacity to reach the groups in greatest need were limited, especially in regard to prevention education, for which there were constraints on how public monies could be used.
- **The vacuum was filled very early by an outpouring of volunteer activity.** This was in part the result of the pulling together of the gay community in the belief that its members could best care for their own.

'The Chimp and the River' by David Quammen

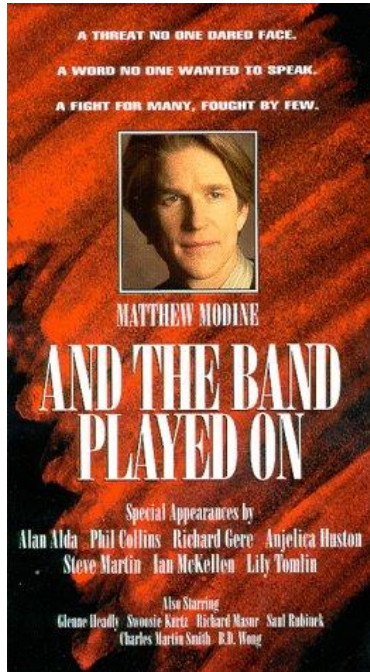
Known history of the virus

H i g h l i g h t s

- SIV - the virus found in 40 different monkey species and which exists in a wide variety of mutations in different strains - is surprisingly common in certain regions, but the SIV which led to HIV actually contains genetic material from two different SIV strains; in other words, it is a hybrid likely caused by two animals fighting or consuming another and genetic evidence suggests this was in the early-1800s.
- HIV first emerged in the human blood supply around 1908, near a tributary of the Congo River in the African country of Cameroon,
- the virus reached Leopoldville (Congo) about 1920, but lurked unnoticed and spread at replacement-rate for over a decade until the well-intentioned-if-misguided use of reusable glass syringes to combat unrelated opportunistic infections facilitated its spread;
- HIV came to the United States between 1966-1969, from plasma acquired in Haiti and sold through a private business to American hospitals, a business which was shut down in 1972 (Haitians had a statistically large prevalence of HIV, one explained by the fact that Haitians were sent to Congo/Zaire about 1960 under the auspices of the United Nations until they were expelled, en masse, by the authoritarian leader five years later; someone brought the virus back about 1966, and many impoverished sold their plasma back when needle reuse and common containers for blood storage were common, thereby causing more infected blood and peoples).
- On at least twelve different occasions in history we have affirmed there to be cross-species spillover. That is, twelve different times SIV was transmitted to humans – likely through butchering of infected animals or bushmeat gathering – and mutated to HIV; of those twelve, one became the progenitor of the majority of HIV/AIDS cases in the world today (HIV-1, Group-M),



Film



“And the Band Played On”

(2 hr, 17 min) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O38zYpzdZg>

Film clips to illustrate challenges in the investigation into the disease and bureaucracy.

22:45 – 25:00 (2 min) – CDC, strategy meeting, limited resources

35:00 – 42:20 (7 min) – Haitians infected, PacMan analogy, intro Gallo

52:00 – 55:00 (3 min) – Proof of STD, how it was rolled out publically. Bathhouse concern. Bureaucracy

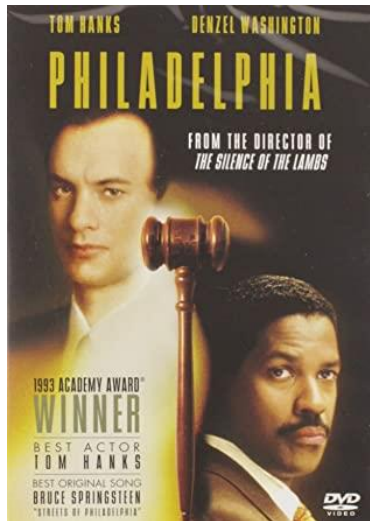
1:01:50 – 1:06:40 (5 min) – Resistance to bath house closures in San Francisco. Gays wanting to preserve their own place of belonging/acceptance in the Castro District.

1:14:0 – 1:33:40 (20 min) – Virus in blood donations; still no test; change name to AIDS

1:41:22 – 1:46:10 (5 min) – Gallo v French; ego

1:48:00 – 1:57:25 (9 min) – Gallo makes progress, wants all credit and patent.

2:02:00 – 2:04:00 (2 min) – Gallo gets patent, plagiarize, start of legal dispute



“Philadelphia” (2 min, 30 sec) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LBP8QD1m6OA>

Film clip on the essence of discrimination

SHOW THIS FIRST (1:30) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tr90d0ZcrCU>

*why client loves the law...to be a part of Justice

SHOW THIS LAST (2:00) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mIqXkwxzUB4>

*discrimination due to homosexuality

Discrimination (2:00p) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YkpHalgTqpw>

Questions to consider . . .

1. What was culture of the US like right before the epidemic started?
- 2-4. “There was a delay in the first four years in the US governments response to the virus.” Please offer three reasons why this was.
5. In what ways was the government way of calling/labeling the virus enhancing discrimination against people who had it?
6. What is the essence of discrimination? (hint: the best definition is offered in the Philadelphia film clip)
- 7-12. In class we addressed over a dozen areas where AIDS/HIV/ARC challenged and significantly changed the culture of the United States. What are six of them? (please be clear...write at least 1-2 sentences per each)