

History of HIV/AIDS in the United States

Trajectory of Course:

This course focuses on the height of AIDS from 1981-1996 in the United States. Adopting the chronology from Richard McKay's work *Patient Zero and the Making of the AIDS Epidemic*, the course subverts popular narratives around AIDS and AIDS activism. Those narratives typically center on white gay men in New York and San Francisco as if they were the sole activists and persons with AIDS (PWAs) during the crisis. This course balances the account by including recent scholarship on the role of the Black Church in fighting AIDS.

The course begins with the links between AIDS and carcerality and its many manifestations, focusing on themes of resistance, knowledge and identity formation and to examine the contours of both the virus' spread and how people/communities responded to the epidemic.

The course demonstrates that AIDS was not solely a disease of white gay upper-class cisgender men in major urban centers, but even in the early years of the epidemic, it was a disease that quickly and disproportionately affected imagined "Others" within US society.

The course also reveals histories of persons and movements creatively and substantively responding to these multi-dimensional issues of incarceration, capitalism, racism, etc. With the hope of complicating our perceptions of movements and responses to HIV/AIDS, the course emphasizes the importance of critical examination of primary sources. Each week, we will engage with a wide-array of primary sources to situate ourselves temporally and spatially within that period, in an attempt to avoid presentist analyses. In the next sections,

I will flesh out the tripartite structure of the course.

The first part of the course intends to contextualize the late-century United States, which means understanding the growth and interconnection of carceral and economic regimes. The course starts with an analysis of the roots of mass incarceration and the intensification of austerity measures during the 70s and 80s. In the first part, we will engage with the early responses to the AIDS epidemic and the beginnings of activism. We will discuss activism and its expansiveness throughout the public health crisis.

The second portion of the course will more intensely focus on responses to AIDS from both a grassroots/organizational perspective, but also responses from prominent institutions like the American Catholic Church, the US federal government, state legislatures, etc. We will see how responses are shaped by the regimes discussed in the previous section. Activism manifested differently in varying locales. The class hopes to destabilize the well-promulgated "San Francisco-New York" axis of mobilization. Even though we will focus some time on the well-known organization like ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power), we shall look beyond this influential organization, such as

efforts of the Balm in Gilead, Fags Organizing to Resist Militarism in Central America -- Fight Against AIDS Group (FORMICA FAG), and numerous others.

The third section will highlight the cultural production created and curated during this period. As a form of activism, at times, a secondary focus in scholarship, this course highlights these ideological struggles as critical to understanding the full impact of AIDS. This course, in part, argues for a centering of cultural work as in conversation and as significant as direct action and organizational efforts.

Assignments:

Every week, students are expected to examine one primary source extracted from the readings from that week or a source which relates to the themes of that week. Please post the primary source and a 2-3 sentence contextual summary of the object/document/video, etc. on Canvas by Monday at 12:00 p.m. The summary should resemble that of a placard in a public exhibit. **20%**

Final Project/Paper: 20-25 page paper. The paper/project can take many forms such as a podcast, online exhibit, storymap, traditional academic paper, etc. Please discuss conceptions for a final project with me well-before the final deadline. **30%**

Participation: **30%**

Students are expected to have thoroughly read the readings before coming to class. Class is a space to critically examine these texts and put them in conversation with one another. This entails that there is an understanding of each text's argument, its methodology and a critique/commendation of the scholars' work prior to class. To spur generative dialogue, at the beginning of class, we will split into smaller groups for 10 minutes to talk to our peers about the readings. Following the ten minutes, we will return as a whole to dissect and discuss the week's readings.

Part 1: Mass Incarceration, Neoliberalism and the Emergence of AIDS

Week 1: Setting Up the Stage & the Early Years

- Introductions, Thought Exercise
- Lillian Faderman. *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015 Chapter 23: The Plague, 414-441.
- Jennifer Brier. *Infectious Ideas: US Political Responses to the AIDS Crisis*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009.
Chapter 1: Affection Is Our Best Protection: Early AIDS Activism and the Legacy of Gay Liberation, 11-44.

Week 2: The Carceral State & Neoliberalism

- Elizabeth Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge: Harvard University

Press, 2016. Chapters 1-4: “The War in Black Poverty,” “Law and Order in the Great Society,” “The Preemptive Strike,” “The War on Black Crime,” 27-179.

- David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. Chapters 2-4: “Construction of Consent,” “The Neoliberal State,” “Uneven Geographical Developments,” 39-119.

Week 3: Incarceration, State Enacted (pt. II)

- René Esparza. “Black Bodies on Lockdown: AIDS Moral Panic and the Criminalization of HIV in Times of White Injury,” *The Journal of African American History*, Volume 104, no. 2, Spring 2019, 31 pages.
- Regina Kunzel, *Criminal Intimacy: Prison and the Uneven History of Modern American Sexuality*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2008, Epilogue, 225-237.
- Heather Ann Thompson. “Why Mass Incarceration Matters: Rethinking Crisis, Decline, and Transformation in Postwar American History.” *Journal of American History* 97, no. 3, (2010): 703-34.

Week 4: AIDS & Migration

- Karma Chavez. *The Borders of AIDS: Race, Quarantine and Resistance*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2021, read full text, 169 pages
- Julio Capo, Jr. “Queering Mariel: Mediating Cold War Foreign Policy and U.S. Citizenship among Cuba’s Homosexual Exile Community 1978-1994.” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 29, no. 4 (2010): 78-106

Week 5: Origins & Apocryphal Beginnings

- Richard A. McKay. *Patient Zero and the Making of the AIDS Epidemic*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017. Chapter 1: “What Came Before Zero” Chapter 2: “The Cluster Study,” 42-138.
- Randy Shilts. *And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic* New York: The Penguin Group, 1987 Part IV: The Gathering Darkness/1982, Patient Zero, 128-140.
- Phil Tiemeyer. *Plane Queer: Labor, Sexuality, and AIDS in the History of Male Flight Attendants*. Berkeley: University of California, 2013. Chapters 6 and 7: “Flight Attendants and the Origins of an Epidemic,” “The Traynor Legacy versus the ‘Patient Zero’ Myth,” 136-193.

Week 6: AIDS, Knowledge, Risk & Technology

- Steven Epstein. *Impure Science: AIDS, Activism, and the Politics of Knowledge*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, read full text.
- Harriet A. Washington. *Medical Apartheid: the Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present* Chapter 13: Infection and Inequity: Illness as Crime, 325-346.
- James Doucett-Battle. *Sweetness in the Blood: Race, Risk and Type-2 Diabetes* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2021. Chapter 3: Algorithms of Risk and Race: Recruiting Black Risk and Marketing Black Bodies, 51-74.

Part II: “Political” Activism/Organizational Efforts

Week 7: In the Fight against AIDS

- Emily Hobson. *Lavender and Red: Liberation and Solidarity in the Gay and Lesbian Left*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2016. Chapters 5 and 6: “Talk About Loving in the War Years: Nicaragua, Transnational Feminism, and AIDS,” “Money for AIDS, Not War: Anti-militarism, Direct Action against the Epidemic, and Movement History,” 120-185.
- Deborah B. Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP’s Fight Against AIDS*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2009, Introduction: “Why Emotion?,” 1-49.
- Sarah Schulman. *Let the Record Show: A Political History of ACT UP New York, 1987-1993*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021, Part VII “Money, Poverty and the Material Reality of AIDS,” 473-512.

Week 8: Black (gay) Identity Formation and Responses to HIV/AIDS

- Jafari Allen. *There’s a disco ball between us: A theory of Black gay life*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021). Chapters 3-5: “Other Countries,” “Disco,” “Black Nations/Queer Nations?,” 76-164.
- E. Patrick Johnson. *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011). Part of Chapter 5: “Trannies, Transvestites and Drag Queens, Oh My!: Transitioning in the South,” 309-337.
- Darius Bost. *Evidence of Being: The Black Gay Cultural Renaissance and the Politics of Violence*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2019, read full text.

Week 9: Black (gay) Identity Formation and Responses to HIV/AIDS p. II

- Jose Esteban Munoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999. Chapter 2: Photographies of Mourning: Melancholia and Ambivalence in Van DerZee, Mapplethorpe, and *Looking for Langston*, (56-76).
- Cathy J. Cohen, *Boundaries of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of Black Politics*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999. Chapters 1-3, “The Boundaries of Black Politics,” “Marginalization: Power, Identity, and Membership,” “Enter AIDS: Context and Confrontation,” 1-118.
- Martin Duberman, *Hold Tight Gently: Essex Hemphill, Michael Callen and the Battlefield of AIDS*, New York: The New Press, 2014, Chapter 5: The Toll Mounts, 145-182, Chapter 6: Drugs into Bodies [203-216, not entire chapter]

Week 10: Complicating the Intersection of Religion and AIDS Activism

- Anthony Petro. *After the Wrath: AIDS, Sexuality and American Religion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. Chapter 1: Emerging Moralities: American Christians, Sexuality and AIDS, 18-52. Chapter 3 Ecclesiastical Authority: AIDS, Sexuality, and the American Catholic Church, 91-136.
- Robert Arpin. *Wonderfully, Fearfully Made: Letters on Living With Hope, Teaching Understanding, And Ministering With Love, from a Gay Catholic Priest With AIDS*.

Harper Collins, 1993. ([Read full text, 207 pages](#))

- Dan Royles. *To Make the Wounded Whole: The African American Struggle Against HIV/AIDS*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020) [Chapter 5: There Is a Balm in Gilead: AIDS Activism in the Black Church](#), 135-164.
- Michael J. O'Loughlin. *Hidden Mercy: AIDS, Catholics, and the Untold Stories of Compassion in the Face of Fear*. Broadleaf Books, 2021. [Chapter 3: Hospital Sisters](#), 27-44. [Chapter 12: Priests with AIDS](#): 133-152.

Week 11: Gendering AIDS Work

- Watch documentary: *Nothing Without Us: The Women Who Will End AIDS* (available on Kanopy with your NetID)
- Dan Royles. *To Make the Wounded Whole: The African American Struggle Against HIV/AIDS*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020, [Chapter 7: The South within the North: Sister Love's Intersectional Approach to HIV/AIDS](#), 195-222.
- Jennifer Brier. *Infectious Ideas: US Political Responses to the AIDS Crisis*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009) [Chapter 5: Drugs into Bodies, Bodies into Health Care: The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power and the Struggle over How Best to Fight AIDS](#), 156-189.
- Sarah Schulman. *Let the Record Show: A Political History of ACT UP New York, 1987-1993*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021. [Chapter 7: Changing the Definition: Women Don't Get AIDS](#), 227-272.
- Beth Ritchie. *Arrested Justice: Black Women, Violence, and America's Prison Nation*. New York: New York University Press, 2012. [Chapter 4: Black Women, Male Violence, and the Buildup of a Prison Nation](#), 99-124.

Week 12: Globalizing AIDS

- Cindy Patton. *Globalizing AIDS*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2002, [read full text, 132 pages](#).
- Jennifer Brier. *Infectious Ideas: US Political Responses to the AIDS Crisis*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009) [Epilogue: We Struggle against It Together: The South African AIDS Alliance, 1996-2003](#), 190-200.
- Paul Farmer. *AIDS and Accusation: Haiti and the Geography of Blame*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992. [Part III: The Exotic and the Mundane: HIV in Haiti](#), 114-132.
- Dan Royles. *To Make the Wounded Whole: The African American Struggle Against HIV/AIDS*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020. [Chapter 6: Stop Medical Apartheid from South Africa to Philadelphia](#), 165-194.

Part III: Cultural Activism & Production/“Psychic Resistance”

Week 13: Cultural Critique

- Douglas Crimp: *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism*. Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1988, [read introduction](#).
- David Wojnarowicz. *Close to Knives: A Memoir of Disintegration*. New York: Vintage, 1991, [read full text](#).

Week 14: Love, Loss, Survival, & Visibility

- Paul Monette. *Borrowed Time: An AIDS Memoir*, New York: Harper Perennial, 1998, [read full text](#).
- Samuel R. Delany. *The Motion of Light in Water*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004, [read excerpt: 34.1](#).
- Samuel R. Delany. “[The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals](#), or Some Informal Remarks towards the Modular Calculus, Part Five.” In *Flight from Neveryon*, Wesleyan University Press, 181-367.

Week 15: Love, Loss, Survival, & Visibility pt. II

- The Other Countries. *Sojourner: Black Gay Voices in the Age of AIDS, Volume II*. Other Countries Press, 1993, [read full text](#)
- Watch documentary: *Tongues Untied* (available on Kanopy with your NetID)
- Essex Hemphill. *Brother to Brother: New Writings by Black Gay Men*. New York. Alyson Publications, 1991, [read \(portion of\) part III](#), 123-171.

Optional reads:

- Pamela Sneed. *Funeral Diva*, City Lights Books, 2020.
- Sean Strub. *Body Count: A Memoir of Politics, Sex, AIDS, and Survival*. New York: Scribner, 2014.

Week 16: AIDS Today

- Linda Villarosa, “America’s Hidden HIV Epidemic: Why do America’s black gay men have a higher rate of HIV than any other country in the world?” *The New York Times*, June 6, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/06/magazine/americas-hidden-hiv-epidemic.html>
- Sydney Baloue, “Voguing for Our Lives. Again.” *The New York Times*, June 20, 2020 <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/20/style/self-care/vogue-trans-black-lives-protest.html?action=click&module=RelatedLinks&pgtype=Article>
- Josie Thaddaeus-Johns, “Portraits of Love and Loss From an H.I.V. Positive Childhood” *The New York Times*, March 3, 2022. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/03/arts/design/kia-labeija-fotografiska.html>

Timeline of Key Events

June 5, 1981 - The Center for Disease Control's *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* (MMWR) declares that five previously healthy gay men contracted *Pneumocystis carinii* pneumonia (PCP) at three Los Angeles area hospitals. This is considered the official start of the epidemic in the United States.

July 3, 1981 - The CDC releases another report in the MMWR with information about Kaposi's Sarcoma and PCP among 26 gay men.

July 3, 1981 - The New York Times published an article with the headline, "Rare Cancer Seen in 41 Homosexuals"

September 15, 1981 - The National Cancer Institute and CDC coordinate the first conference to address the new epidemic in the United States.

December 10, 1981 - San Francisco nurse Bobbi Campbell became the first person to publicly announce his KS diagnosis. In addition to his announcement, he began writing a newspaper column entitled, "Gay Cancer Journal"

January 4, 1982 - Gay Men's Health Crisis is founded in New York City, the first community-based AIDS service organization in the United States.

May 11, 1982 - *The New York Times* published the first mention of GRID (Gay Related Immune Deficiency)

September 24, 1982 - CDC used the term "AIDS" (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) for the first time in the MMWR.

January 1, 1983 - Ward 86 became the first dedicated outpatient AIDS clinic. It opened at San Francisco General Hospital. The hospital became well-known for its "San Francisco Model of Care," eventually its approach became appropriated as the global standard for care.

January 7, 1983 - The CDC's MMWR reported the first cases of AIDS in women.

May 18, 1983 - The U.S. Congress passed the first bill that included spending explicitly targeted for AIDS research and treatment. Congress allocated \$12 million for agencies within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

September 30, 1983 - After Joseph Sonnabend, A New York physician, is threatened with eviction for helping AIDS patients, the Lambda Legal group and the state's Attorney General collaborate to file the first AIDS discrimination lawsuit.

November 22-25, 1983 - The World Health Organization holds its first meetings to gauge the status of HIV/AIDS globally.

April 23, 1984 - U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Margaret Heckler announced that Dr. Robert Galo discovered the cause of AIDS, a retrovirus called HTLV-III.

October 9, 1984 - *The New York Times* published an article stating that new scientific evidence may indicate that AIDS is transmissible through saliva. This possibility would not be disproven for another two years.

October 10, 1984 - San Francisco public health officials ordered the closing of bathhouses.

March 2, 1985 - The U.S. Food Drug Administration authorized the first commercial blood test to detect HIV. The kit was called ELISA and following the authorization, blood banks began screening blood supplies for HIV.

August 27, 1985 - Ryan White, an Indiana teenager, contracted AIDS through contaminated blood products. He is denied entry to his middle school following his diagnosis generating national attention and protracted legal battles.

September 17, 1985 - President Ronald Reagan, for the first time, publicly mentions AIDS.

October 2, 1985 - The U.S. Congress allocated nearly \$190 million for AIDS research. This amount was \$70 million more than the Reagan administration's request.

October 25, 1985 - The New York State Public Health Council encouraged the closing of gay bathhouses, clubs and bars.

December 13, 1985 - 20 month-old Dwight Burk became the first child of a hemophiliac to be born with AIDS.

December 19, 1985 - A Los Angeles Times poll claimed a slight majority of Americans favor quarantining persons with AIDS.

July 18, 1986 - A group of community leaders met with the U.S. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop at The National Conference on AIDS in the Black Community in Washington, DC.

October 24, 1986 - CDC reported that AIDS cases are disproportionately affecting Black and Latinx communities across the United States. Black and Latinx children, at this moment, comprised 90 percent of perinatally acquired AIDS cases.

March 12, 1987 - AIDS Activist Larry Kramer, after a fiery speech, is attributed with the founding of ACT UP in New York City.

March 19, 1987 - The U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved the first medication for AIDS, AZT (zidovudine), an antiretroviral drug initially created to aid cancer patients.

May 31, 1987 - President Ronald Reagan made his first public speech about AIDS.

June 24, 1987 - President Reagan signed an Executive Order creating the first Presidential Commission on AIDS.

October 11, 1987 - For the first time, the AIDS Memorial Quilt is displayed at the National Mall.

October 14, 1987 - With an overwhelming majority, the U.S. Senate adopted the Helms Amendment which required federally funded educational content on AIDS to underscore sexual abstinence and proscribed material which may encourage homosexuality or drug use.

November 1987 - Debra Fraser-Howe, director of teenage services at the Urban League New York, founded the National Black Leadership Commission on AIDS.

November 4, 1988 - President Reagan signed into law the Health Omnibus Programs Extension (HOPE) Act. The legislation permitted the use of federal funds for AIDS-related services.

December 16, 1988 - Vocalist Sylvester James, Jr. died from AIDS-related complications. James was an out Black gay entertainer well-known for his disco track "You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real)," among many other dance tunes.

December 27, 1988 - Gay rights activist and writer Joseph Beam died at 33 from an AIDS-related illness. Beam was known for his anthology *In the Life*, which was the first collection of writings of Black gay men about their personal and communal experiences with HIV/AIDS.

1989 - The number of AIDS cases in the United States reaches 100,000.

September 10, 1989 - Nearly a hundred Black clergy, including Christian ministers, Muslim imams, Native American shamans, Yoruba priests, and Ethiopian Hebrew rabbis, gathered to walk around Harlem hospital and attend to the sick.

1991 - The National Minority Council along with the National Association of People with AIDS and the National Interfaith Network coordinated the National Skills Building Conference, which eventually shall become the United States Conference on AIDS.

December 18, 1993 - Following much protest and backlash, the CDC expanded the case definition of AIDS. Now, the definition included persons with CD4 counts below 200 to have AIDS. In addition, it added persons with pulmonary tuberculosis, recurrent pneumonia and invasive cervical cancer, which primarily affected women and drug users, to the list of clinical indicators of AIDS.