

GROUP 1

Reading Primary Sources Guide

Document Creator/Source	Who wrote it? When? Why? Is it a plausibly reliable source?
Audience	Who was the intended audience? Was there more than one audience/purpose?
Historical Background	When and where was the document created? What was different then? How did circumstances at that time affect the content?
Close Reading	What language (words, ideas, phrases, images) does the document use to persuade the audience(s)? How does the language reveal the author's perspective?

Small Group Investigation and Questioning of Documents A & B

1. Compare the rhetoric and tone of the Balm in Gilead document with that of the Prayer Week. Which convinced you they were in the trenches with victims of AIDS?
2. Who was the audience for each of these events?
3. What do you think was the goal of each of these events?

REPORT OUT TO GROUP: What inhibited or ignited the Black Christian church responses to AIDS? Give evidence and examples.

Document A The Balm in Gilead, Inc.

**A Proclamation from
THE BALM IN GILEAD, INC.**
An Organization Dedicated to Healing the African American Community Through Prayer, Health Education and Advocacy

THE AFRICAN AMERICAN CLERGY'S DECLARATION OF WAR ON HIV/AIDS

The time has come today to face the depth of devastation caused by AIDS in the African American community; to recognize that African Americans are the most disproportionately represented community of color with respect to HIV/AIDS; that AIDS continues to be the leading cause of death nationwide of African American men between the ages of 35 and 44, and of African American women between the ages of 25 and 44; that the number of teenagers infected with HIV nearly doubles each year; and that each and every American knows someone, or in the next 12 months will know someone who has died of AIDS.

The African American Church has a long and distinguished tradition of leading its people to light in times of great suffering, and of caring for its parishioners. It has a proud history of pastoral activism and has proven itself a formidable mobilizer of congregations. But the time has come today to recognize that as far as our churches have come in the night, there are steps yet to go before dawn; that the African American religious community, despite this legacy, has too long been negligent on the most pressing subject of AIDS/HIV. The church's godly mission is to minister love and support to its congregations, and to forsake no one, yet, until today, it has not assumed its proper mantle of responsibility in this time of chaos caused by the ravages of AIDS to mind, body and soul of our people.

Now, therefore, we, leaders of African American churches in America, deem it necessary to acknowledge by means of this proclamation that only through stalwart commitment, strength of mind and courage of heart on the part of the religious community can we ever hope to combat the AIDS epidemic. By this proclamation, we declare our intent to do all in our power to eradicate the scourge of AIDS in our time; to wage a war on fear and ignorance of AIDS/HIV, from the pulpit and in our institutions, until such a time as AIDS is no longer a threat to the lives of the people, and we call upon our fellow clergy, men and women, to do the same.

We, members of the clergy of African American churches in America, recognizing that as long as one human being remains uneducated, as long as one human being suffers from AIDS, it is one too many; we vow to develop comprehensive AIDS prevention programs for our youth; to develop effective AIDS awareness and prevention strategies for and with our congregations and communities; to provide supportive counseling to Persons Living with AIDS and to their non-infected families and loved ones; and to preach consciousness-raising sermons about AIDS prevention and compassion for all, regardless of sexual orientation, drug dependency, or lifestyle choices.

We furthermore affirm our commitment to working with grassroots organizations, corporations, and governmental bodies on the federal, state and municipal levels to secure generous financial support of AIDS awareness and prevention and to educate our congregations in those programs; and to work throughout our own institutions, the seminaries and schools of theology, to combat silence on the subject of AIDS and promote an enlightened, non-judgmental clergy, unimpeded in the war on AIDS by nonproductive biases.

We furthermore affirm our commitment to identifying tangible goals and means of assessing progress on those goals, formulating policy, and engaging in advocacy on behalf of our communities with respect to the issues around AIDS.

We furthermore affirm our support for The Black Church National Day of Prayer for the Healing of AIDS as a vehicle for mobilizing African American religious institutions to fight AIDS through prayer, education, and advocacy nationwide. And in this resolve advocate for universal health care.

We furthermore affirm that from this day forward, we resolve to open our eyes and acknowledge those persons among us living with AIDS and their families and loved ones, and to encourage others to see; to open our ears to their voices among us, and to insist that others hear; to open our hearts in compassion, and expect others to do the same, and in so doing, cast off the denial that has hindered our churches in the past, and in so doing move forward with a sense of divine mission to educate our communities, our congregations and our fellow clergy about AIDS, and in so doing, say at last, Surely, there is a balm in Gilead.

In witness whereof, we have hereunto set our hand this twenty-eighth day of February, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred ninety four, on the occasion of the first African American Religious Leaders Summit on HIV/AIDS, convened by The Balm In Gilead, Inc., at The White House, in Washington, District of Columbia.

(The document contains numerous handwritten signatures of African American clergy members, including names like Rev. James A. Jordan, Jr., Rev. Richard L. Tolliver, and Rev. Barbara L. Kincaid.)

The above signatures are those of: Bishop John H. Adams; Rev. Dr. Leroy Aikles, Sr.; Bishop Joseph B. Bethaz; Rev. Cecily Broderick Y. Guerra; Rev. Mercedes W. Brown; Rev. Howard A. Bryant, Sr.; Dr. Margaret J. Cozzani; Rev. Barbara Evans; Dr. Elan Fungate-Jones; Rev. Dr. James A. Forbes, Jr.; Rev. Dr. Michael A. Frazier, Sr.; Rev. Donald Gilmore; Rev. Dr. Willie E. Givens, Jr.; Dr. J. Curtis Goss; Rev. Dr. Terrie Griffin-Price; Rev. Dr. Forrest E. Harris, Sr.; Rev. Dr. Alvin G. Jackson; Rev. Carl A. Johnson; Rev. Sam E. Johnson; Rev. Dr. Barbara L. King; Rev. H. Michael Lemmons; Rev. Karen Morrow; Rev. Julia Mayo-Quintana; Rev. Bill McGill; Dr. Megan S. McLaughlin; Rev. Dr. Clarence G. Newsum; Silas Norman, Jr., MD; Rev. Dr. Tyrone S. Pitts; Rev. Patricia A. Reberg; Rev. Dr. Edwin C. Sanders, II; Rev. Dr. Gary V. Simpson; Rev. Diane Smalley; Rev. Jonathan R. Staples; Rev. Dr. Jack Sullivan, Jr.; Rev. Merriam Taylor; Rev. Dr. Kwani A. Thomell; Dr. Richard L. Tolliver; Rev. Dr. Harold D. Truitt; Rev. The Rt. Rev. Otis G. Walker, Jr.; Rev. Dr. Preston R. Washington, Sr.; Rev. Canon Frederick Williams; Rev. Saul S. Williams; Rev. Dr. Richard W. Wilks, Sr.; Rev. Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr.; Rev. Alfonso Wyatt

On February 28, 1994, leaders from the Black Church congregated in Washington, DC to sign a "Declaration of War on HIV/AIDS." The document called upon the Black community to end the "scourge of AIDS in our time" and "to wage a war on fear and ignorance of AIDS/HIV"

Citation: "The Balm of Gilead, Inc.," Susan M. Chambré Research Files on Volunteer AIDS Organizations, Yale University Manuscripts and Archives MS 2054 Box 9 Folder 4.

Document B AIDS Prayer Week

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AIDS Prayer Week: West Side Churches Spread the Healing

By EMILY TORGAN

Last Thursday night, a multiracial crowd of nearly 500 people rose, clapped and swayed to the jubilant R&B music filling a West 116th Street church. They had come to offer remembrances to AIDS victims, but as the crowd cheered the Supremes-like pivots of singers in sequined dresses, the service seemed more hopeful than sorrowful. The evening, the fifth event in the Harlem Week of Prayer for the Healing of AIDS, had done much to reach the organizers' goal—lifting the stigma that has deepened the disease's ravages.

After the concert, Pernessa Seele, founder and CEO of the fourth annual week of prayer, mounted the pulpit and addressed the crowd in the Southern Baptist style she knew as a child.

"We must throw off the garments of fear," Seele cried out, receiving "amens" and thunderous applause. "We must take off racism, homophobia and internalized racism. . . . Without further ado, let the healing begin."

The crowd stood and clapped wildly.

Seele, vice president of Harlem Churches for Community Improvement and a former scientist, spent a year designing the week's events, a unique series which joined medicine, education, politics and com-

passion under the mantle of religion to help a minority community stricken by AIDS.

Later, Seele described her motives for organizing the week of prayer, which kicked off Sept. 27 with a Boy's Choir of Harlem concert and finished Sunday with an address by Faye Wattleton, the former Planned Parenthood leader and current talk-show hostess.

"I'm black, I'm Christian, I'm a New Yorker. I've lost 17 friends to AIDS, and I know that there are approximately 10,000 HIV-positive people in Harlem right now," said Seele. "Blacks and Hispanics are disproportionately afflicted."

Besides the concert, service and Wattleton's speech, the week of prayer included a seminar on spiritual and physical therapy, a workshop on bridging gaps between medicine and religion, a discussion on volunteerism and a youth speak-out.

Pauline Barfield, a spokesperson for Seele, called the seminar on spiritual therapy particularly moving.

"This is a very macho community, where AIDS carries a massive stigma, and it was really something

to see 217 HIV-positive people coming out and comforting each other," said Barfield.

Churches of five Christian faiths and one mosque hosted the programs; four of the seven events took place in West Side churches, and over 1,000 people participated.

Seele says she was chosen by a

Many announced in public for the first time that they had tested positive for the AIDS virus.

higher power to implement the week of prayer, but her personal religious faith, education and work experience also propelled her.

Brought up religious in South Carolina, Seele holds a B.S. from Clark College and an M.S. in immunology from Atlanta University. Seele worked as a drug addiction program administrator for Harlem Hospital, as an AIDS consultant for the Narcotic Drug and Research Institute, and was the first AIDS coordinator for Interfaith Medical Center's methadone clinics.

As Seele watched the AIDS epi-

demic devastate the black and Latino communities, she knew there was a desperate need for leadership.

Recognizing that the power centers of the impoverished black and Latino communities were the churches, Seele turned to the clergy. Still, she realized that many of the means of transmitting and preventing AIDS, such as homosexual intercourse, drug use and condoms, were against church teachings.

"The churches used to have a very hypocritical stance," said Seele. "They were supposed to help the sick. And there were always homosexuals and drug addicts worshipping there."

"But eventually," continued Seele, "AIDS brought the situation home, because many people the churches loved were dying. The AIDS crisis, which started as taboo, had to be dealt with effectively. It wasn't enough to be moved — the churches had to be moved to action."

Many of the people Seele brought together for the week of prayer meant action.

Beny Primm, M.D., director of the Office of Treatment Improvement in Washington, D.C., came to tell Tuesday's audience the rampant

spread of AIDS was the cumulative effect of vast social problems.

"This is a disease of poverty, and we need a social earthquake to treat it," said Primm, who explained the connections between substance abuse, AIDS and tuberculosis, a very contagious respiratory disease that kills AIDS patients and can infect the healthy.

Primm urged the clergy to see AIDS resulting from poor quality-of-life conditions, to treat the infected compassionately, and to push for better public health services. Primm told church officials that staying informed about health problems was vital, as the average woman with AIDS lives 11 months and the average man 14. If treatment begins early, said Primm, lives may be prolonged and the transition from life to death may be eased.

Faye Wattleton also attacked social conditions, calling AIDS a plight of race and class. Wattleton asked why black and Latino women were 19 percent of the country's female population and 73 percent of the country's women-with-AIDS population. A preacher's daughter, Wattleton said she saw the vital link between spiritual involvement and AIDS, but she pleaded with the community not to count on divine intervention to protect its health.

Afterward, Wattleton, who re-

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In 1992, *The Westsider* published an article about The Balm in Gilead's annual prayer for healing. Hundreds of people congregated to commemorate those who died from AIDS. This was the fourth iteration of the annual event. Seele spoke at the event and spoke about the intersection of faith and medicine.

Citation: Emily Torgan, "AIDS Prayer Week: Westside Churches Spread the Healing," found in Susan M. Chambré Research Files on Volunteer AIDS Organizations, Yale University Manuscripts and Archives MS 2054 Box 9 Folder 4.

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