

# ACT UP



Keith Haring, "Ignorance = Fear, Silence = Death," 1989

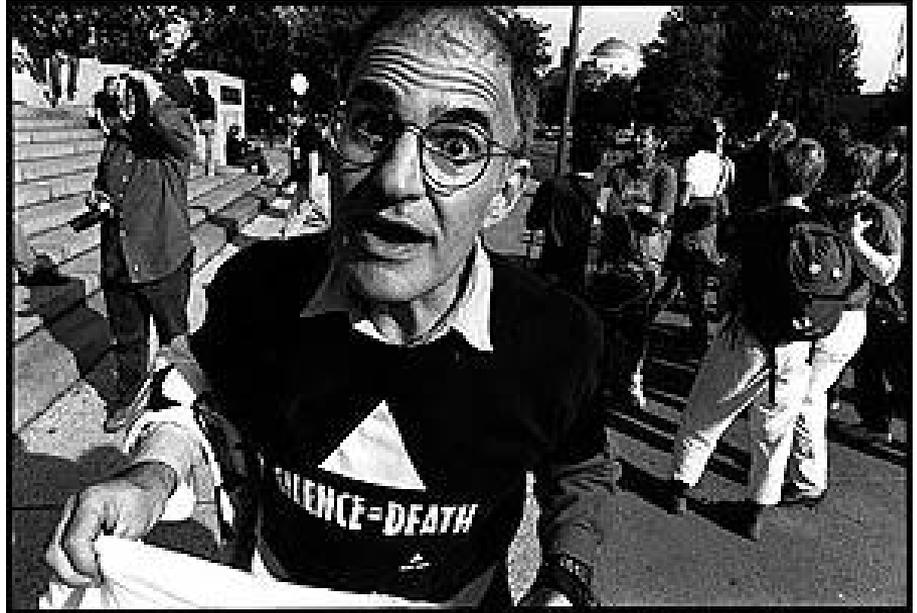
# AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power

- ACT-UP was formed in March of 1987 out of the gay community of New York City and their first meeting was on March 12, 1987. They were committed to finding a HIV treatment and using confrontational activism to fight the AIDS crisis! “Silence = Death” was this group’s slogan
- This spread across the United States and increased the AIDS activism well in the 1990’s
- During the early/mid 1980’s when the AIDS crisis was on the rise, the government either ignored the crisis or decided to take certain measures to isolate the AIDS victims and put them even more at risk
- [https://youtu.be/Q\\_wGtL\\_rOM](https://youtu.be/Q_wGtL_rOM)



# Larry Kramer

- AIDS Activist in New York City, Co-Founded Gay Men's Health Crisis
- Formed the activist group ACT-UP
- Kramer was enraged by the government's lack of taking any action to help the AIDS crisis and refused to stay quiet no matter how many times people demanded he keep quiet about the issue
- During the early 1980's, Kramer wrote a piece for the *Native* called "1,112 and Counting" which outlined the details of the "plague" that most were trying to ignore.
- <https://youtu.be/KN9fiecxylM?t=1m6s>



“ACT UP, Fight Back, FIGHT AIDS!”



SILENCE=DEATH



### YOUR IMMEDIATE ACTION IS NEEDED!

ACTG 175, the protocol from hell that will devour a huge chunk of AIDS research resources for the next 2-4 years, is close to being implemented despite community outcry. This trial is designed to compare combinations of AZT, ddI and ddC in people with 200-500 T cells. Research on treatments for opportunistic infections, treatments specific to women, injection drug users and other impacted populations, second generation antivirals, natural and traditional treatments, etc. are being left by the wayside by the AIDS Clinical Trials Group so that more money can be spent on the cash cows of the pharmaceutical industry.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- Write or call David Katzman and Scott Hammer (the co-chairs of ACTG 175), Anthony Fauci (the director of NIAID), and Dan Hoeh (director of the division of AIDS at NIAID) and demand a change in the ACTG's priorities, beginning with a stop to ACTG 175.
- Endorse the attached consensus letter and return it to ACT UP/San Francisco.
- Advocate against ACTG 175 and for trials that meet the needs of the AIDS community at your local AIDS Clinical Trial Unit Community Advisory Board.

Your input and help are welcome and needed.  
Contact Jason Heyman, (415) 252-8034, or Paul Shirazi, (415) 255-1029.

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**10,000**  
NEW YORK CITY  
**AIDS**  
**DEATHS**  
**How'm I**  
**DOIN'?**

# Organizational Structure

- Decentralized network of locally autonomous chapters in US, Canada, Australia, and Europe
  - OUT in DC, MASS ACT OUT in Boston, GUTS in Dallas
- Highly inclusive, anyone in battle against HIV/AIDS welcome
- Peaked in 1991: 113 chapters worldwide

## Modes of Actions: Civil Disobedience

- Engaged in demonstrations to disrupt certain organizations and to bring attention to HIV/AIDS struggle
- 24 March 1987, first demonstration targeted FDA's sluggish drug approval process
  - hundreds of activists stopped traffic on Wall Street, 17 arrested

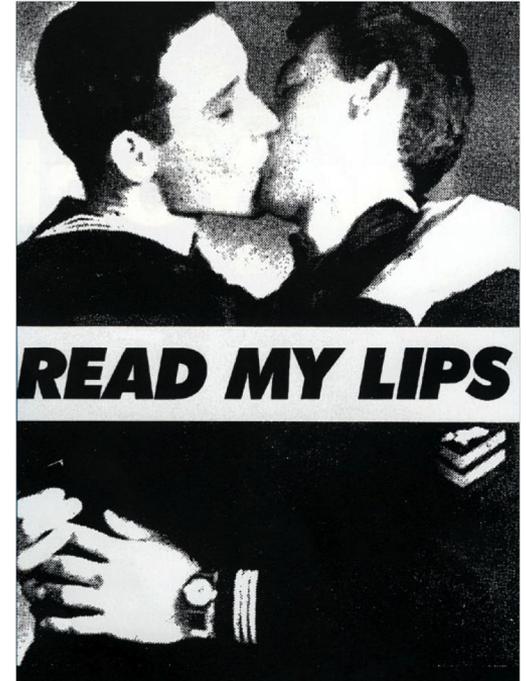
# Modes of Actions: Street Theater

- Die-ins: some participants 'died' while others outlined bodies in white chalk
- Dumped coffin fulls of cremated ashes of AIDS victims
- Kiss-ins meant to grab attention and address homophobia



# Modes of Actions: Advertisements

- Sex-radical, queer-positive sexual politics
- Challenged homophobia and stereotypes about AIDS



# Successes

- Pressured FDA and others for changes in health care delivery, drug testing and approval
- Increased awareness of and funds for HIV/AIDS
- Gained control of and disseminated medical knowledge



“ACT UP transformed the participants’ “emotional culture” from shame and grief to rage by protest.”

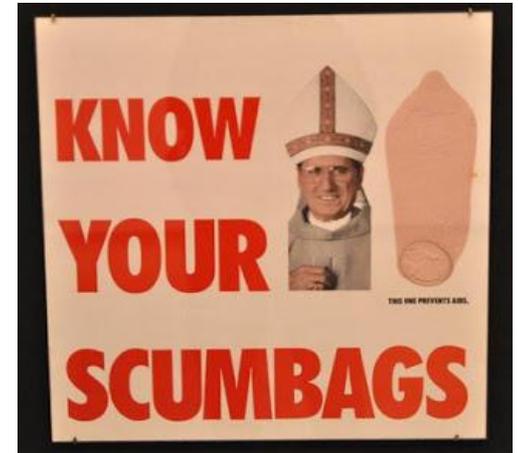
# Criticisms: a problem of strategy?

- A confrontational attitude: only acting with subversive spectacular actions that deeply questions the *statu quo*.
- Too radical for a heteronormative society?



1989 “Stop the Church” action

1989 Poster during the  
“Stop the Church” protests



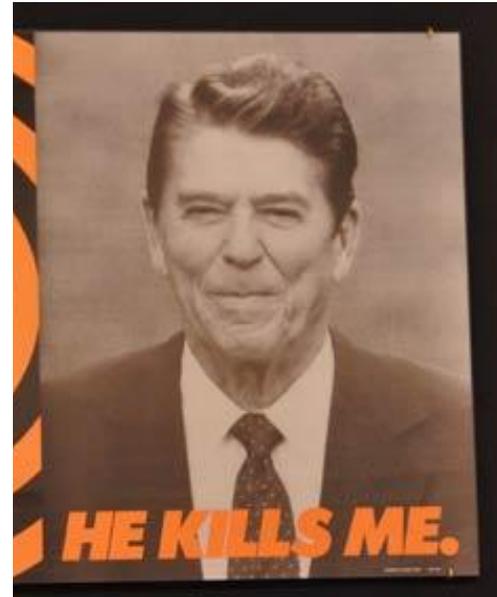
- Only way of being on the media.

# Criticisms: radicality as a principle

- No compromise
- Mode of organization: decentralized, autonomous, chaotic
- “United in anger” vs. today



- The difficulty of being radical.
- Personalizing the attacks



# Criticisms: was ACT-UP too white, too gay, too urban?

- In 2000, in **Paris** :
  - $\frac{2}{3}$  of **young men** in which **88 % is gay or bisexual**
  - $\frac{1}{3}$  of **women** in which  $\frac{1}{3}$  is **lesbian or bisexual**
  - 20 % of the activists have AIDS
  - Socio-professional categories: middle and upper classes.
  - Often engaged politically.
- Not a lot of non-white people.
- A worldwide organization... Only active on Western countries.

# Connections to queer theories

- Indirect connections, even if ACT-UP spreaded and popularized the “queer” identity
- Members of ACT-UP who became queer theorists
- Transforming the insult in a positive term
- Activists experiences a new relationship with body, death, illness, power, anger and losses.



Keith Haring, *Untitled (Body painting)*, 1984  
Photo taken by Robert Mapplethorpe.  
Model: Grace Jones

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