



Document Set: AIDS in the Media

Instructions: Examine the included documents. Then, as a group, discuss the questions below. Be prepared to share your discussions with the rest of the class.

Questions:

1. Do you notice any individuals, institutions, or organizations that reoccur throughout the timeline (**Document 1**)? What is their significance?
2. Based on **Document 1**, how did the media portray the AIDS epidemic early on? What effects might have had on the way the public thought about AIDS?
3. Who were some of the principal media figures or celebrities who advocated for AIDS awareness in **Document 1**? Why did they choose to pursue such a project?
4. In what ways might have the media's coverage of the AIDS epidemic been beneficial to the LGBTQ+ community, despite the terrible circumstances?
5. In **Document 2**, how does Wojnarowicz describe his experience with the AIDS crisis? What feeling do you think he was trying to convey?
6. In **Document 3**, how would you characterize Press Secretary Speakes' reaction to learning about the AIDS crisis? How are the journalists responding?
7. How would you contrast the mood evoked in Wojnarowicz's account of the AIDS crises in **Document 2** with the account in **Document 3**? What might this say about the different ways the crisis was experienced between the LGBTQ+ community and "mainstream" American society?



Document 1: Timeline 1981-1991

<p>1981 — The New York Times publishes an article on recent reports by the Center of Disease Control (CDC) of gay men dying of Kaposi Sarcoma, a rare form of cancer. Through the article, the term “gay cancer” enters into public conversation.</p>	<p>The New York Times introduces the term Gay-Related Immune Deficiency (GRID), further reinforcing the notion that AIDS only affects gay men.</p>
<p>The Los Angeles Times runs the first front-page article on AIDS for a major publication.</p>	<p>Bobbi Campbell appears with his partner, Bobby Hillard, on the cover of Newsweek for an article about AIDS. It is the first time two gay men are pictured embracing in a major publication. Campbell dies of AIDS-related illness the following year.</p>
<p>San Francisco nurse Bobbi Campbell becomes the first patient of Kaposi Sarcoma to go public by writing a newspaper column about living with “gay cancer.”</p>	<p>Ryan White, a hemophiliac who contracted AIDS through blood products, is denied entry into his middle school. The resulting legal battle gains media attention, and Ryan’s advocacy for AIDS education helps de-stigmatize the disease.</p>
<p>Movie star Rock Hudson dies of AIDS-related illness. Hudson is the first celebrity to announce he contracted AIDS, and leaves \$250,000 to start the Foundation for AIDS Research, an organization co-founded by Elizabeth Taylor, actress and friend of Rock Hudson.</p>	<p>Famous pianist Liberace dies of AIDS-related illness. At first, the cause of his death is concealed. The event reinforces the stigma attached to the disease, and spurs a national conversation of a patient’s right to privacy.</p>
<p>Princess Diana’s visit to Casey House, a specialized HIV/AIDS hospital in Toronto, makes international headlines after photographs of her shaking hands with patients are published. She soon becomes a figurehead against the stigmatization of people living with AIDS.</p>	<p>Artist and activist Keith Haring dies of AIDS-related illness.</p>
<p>In Florida, a federal judge allows the Ray brothers, three students who contracted AIDS through their hemophilia, to enroll in school. In response, town residents refuse to send their own children to the school, and someone burns down the brothers’ family house.</p>	<p>Activist Ryan White dies of AIDS-related illness.</p>
<p>Elizabeth Taylor founds the Elizabeth Taylor AIDS Foundation to provide care for people living with AIDS.</p>	<p>Fredie Mercury, lead singer of the band Queen, dies of AIDS-related illness.</p>
<p>Elizabeth Taylor announces that he is HIV-positive.</p>	<p>Basketball star Earvin “Magic” Johnson</p>



Document 2: From David Wojnarowicz, "Being Queer in America: A Journal of Disintegration" (1991)

So I'm watching this thing move around in my environment, among friends and strangers: something invisible and abstract and scary; some connect-the-dots version of hell only it's not as simple as hell. It's got no shape yet or else maybe I'm just blind to it or we're just blind to it or else it is just invisible until all the dots are connected. Draw a line from here to there to there to here with all the dots being people you see from miles up in the air or from the ledge of a tall building or the window of a small plane but it's still not that easy, no that abstract because you can't shut out the smell of rotting. You can't shut out the sound of it: the sound of the man standing on the sidewalk trying to scream that he's going to throw himself in front of the passing automobiles because he wants to stop that slowly drawn line approaching him from the distance with all the undeniability of a slow train carrying sixteen tons of pressure; with all the measure and intent of crushing him but the guy is too weak to even get this amount of control over his life, he can't even throw a fit the proper way. You can't shut out the sights and sounds of death, the people waking up with the diseases of small birds or mammals; the people whose faces are entirely black with cancer eating health salads in the lonely seats of restaurants. Those images hurl themselves from the corners of a fast-paced city and you can't even imagine death properly enough to tell this guy you understand what he's railing against. I mean, hell, on the first day that he found out he had this certain virus he bent down to pick up a letter addressed to him that had fallen from the mailbox and he turned and said, "Even something so simple as getting a letter in the mail has an entirely different meaning."



Document 3: A transcript between journalist Lester Kinsolving and Ronald Reagan's press secretary Larry Speakes, during a White House Press Briefing on October 15, 1982

Lester Kinsolving: Does the president have any reaction to the announcement by the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta that AIDS is now an epidemic in over 600 cases?

Larry Speakes: AIDS? I haven't got anything on it.

Kinsolving: Over a third of them have died. It's known as "gay plague." [Press pool laughter.] No, it is. It's a pretty serious thing. One in every three people that get this have died. And I wonder if the president was aware of this.

Speakes: I don't have it. [Press pool laughter.] Do you?

Kinsolving: You don't have it? Well, I'm relieved to hear that, Larry! [Press pool laughter.]

Speakes: Do you?

Kinsolving: No, I don't.

Speakes: You didn't answer my question. How do you know? [Press pool laughter.]

Kinsolving: Does the president—in other words, the White House—look on this as a great joke?

Speakes: No, I don't know anything about it, Lester.

Kinsolving: Does the president. . . does anyone in the White House know about this epidemic, Larry?

Speakes: I don't think so, I don't think there has been any. . .

Kinsolving: Nobody knows?

Speakes: There's been no personal experience here, Lester.

Kinsolving: No, I mean, I thought you were keeping. . .

Speakes: I checked thoroughly with Dr. Ruge [physician to the President] this morning and he's had no patients suffer from AIDS or whatever it is. [Press pool laughter]

Kinsolving: The president doesn't have gay plague, is that what your saying, or what?

Speakes: Nope, I didn't say that.

Kinsolving: Didn't say that.

Speakes: I thought I heard you were in the State department over there, why didn't you stay over there?

Kinsolving: Because I love YOU, Larry, that's why.

Speakes: Oh, I see. . .well, I don't. . .Let's don't put it in those terms, Lester! [Press pool laughter].

Lester Kinsolving: I retract that! [Press pool laughter].

Larry Speakes: I hope so.