



Document Set: AIDS Activism and Advocacy

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. Using **Document 1** as a guide, can you identify the principal individuals, organizations, or institutions that played a role in advocating for AIDS awareness? What role did they play?
2. Based on the information in **Document 1**, what kinds of people became advocates for AIDS awareness? How were they affected by the epidemic?
3. Based on **Document 1**, what were some of the demands made by AIDS activists during this time?
4. What sorts strategies did activist individuals and organizations pursue, according to **Document 1**?
5. Based on the information on **Document 2**, how did president H.W. Bush respond to the AIDS crisis?
6. According to **Document 3**, why did Urvashi Vaid and the Gay & Lesbian Task Force remain unsatisfied with president Bush's response? What were their demands?



Document 1: Timeline 1981-1992

1981	<p>Writer and film producer Larry Kramer holds a gathering of over 80 gay men in New York City to discuss an emerging epidemic. He invites a doctor to speak, and begins a fund-raising campaign in support of researching the yet-to-be-named epidemic.</p>
1982	<p>An activist group in San Francisco publishes and distributes the first pamphlet on safer sex at the International Lesbian & Gay Freedom Day Parade.</p>
1983	<p>In Denver, activists take over a stage at the National AIDS Forum and read a statement known as The Denver Principles, which demand people living with AIDS play a role in creating AIDS-related policy.</p>
1987	<p>Activist Larry Kramer founds the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT-UP), a direct-action group developed to pressure governments, elected officials, health industries, and religious organizations to act on behalf of people living with AIDS. Their first major protest occurs on Wall Street, with activists demanding changes on a variety of issues, from drug pricing to legislation to education.</p>
1988	<p>Elizabeth Glaser, an HIV-positive mother of two HIV-positive children, forms the Pediatric AIDS Foundation, which provides funding for improved treatments for children.</p>
1990	<p>ACT UP protests at the National Institute of Health (NIH), demanding more treatments and an expansion of clinical trials to more women and people of color.</p>
1991	<p>The Visual AIDS Artists Caucus begins the Red Ribbon Project to demonstrate compassion for people living with AIDS and their caregivers. The red ribbon becomes the international symbol of AIDS awareness.</p>
1992	<p>ACT UP holds a mass funeral in front of the White House. They pour ashes of loved ones upon the White House lawn, and make public eulogies for those that died of AIDS. The action was inspired by the writing of David Wojnarowicz, who suggested those who died of AIDS be remembered in such a public way.</p>



Document 2: Philip J. Hiltz, "Bush, in First Address on AIDS, Backs a Bill to Protect Its Victims," New York Times (1990)

In his first address on AIDS since he took office, President Bush appealed today for compassion toward people infected with the AIDS virus and expressed support for a bill that would outlaw discrimination against people with AIDS and other diseases.

Giving an unusual personal perspective in his speech, Mr. Bush said, "Like many of you, Barbara and I have had friends who have died of AIDS. Our love for them when they were sick and when they died was just as great and just as intense as for anyone lost to heart disease or cancer or accidents."

Mr. Bush added, "There is only one way to deal with an individual who is sick: with dignity, compassion, care, confidentiality and without discrimination."

Speaking at a conference here sponsored by the National Leadership Coalition on AIDS, which includes executives of large companies, the President said: "We don't spurn the accident victim who didn't wear a seat belt. We don't reject the cancer patient who didn't quit smoking cigarettes. We try to love them and care for them and comfort them. We do not fire them. We don't evict them. We don't cancel their insurance."

. . .The President gave his personal support to legislation that would prevent discrimination against disabled people, including those infected with the AIDS virus, chiefly in regard to employment or access to public buildings and services. The Bush Administration has already supported the measure in Congress, where it has passed the Senate and two of four committees in the House.

In his speech Mr. Bush said the Government was "on a wartime footing" at the National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control, which conduct research on AIDS and the human immunodeficiency virus, or H.I.V., which causes it. "We are slashing red tape," he said. "Accelerating schedules. Boosting research." Mr. Bush also told the conference: "Our goal is to turn irrational fear into rational facts. Every American must learn what AIDS is and what AIDS is not. And they must learn now."



His speech drew protesters outside the room where he spoke, and five people were arrested. Two who did get in broke into his speech four times, shouting that his remarks should have come 14 months ago at the start of his Presidency. They were escorted from the room and ejected from the Gateway Marriott Hotel, where the conference was held. [...]

The speech was repeatedly interrupted by Urvashi Vaid, the executive director of National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. At one point the President stopped and told the gathering of business leaders: "I understand the concern that these people feel. If we do nothing else, I hope we can make them understand that not only you care, but we care, too."

Mr. Bush said his Administration and the Reagan Administration had begun clinical trials for AIDS drugs and expanded the availability of drugs. His budget for the fiscal year 1991 seeks \$1.7 billion for AIDS research, treatment and education, up from \$1.6 billion for the current year.



Document 3: Press Release from the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF), by Geni Cowen and John D'Emilio (1990)

MR. PRESIDENT, MAY WE HAVE YOUR ATTENTION...WHY URVASHI VAID STOOD UP TO SPEAK TO GEORGE BUSH

On March 29, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) Executive Director Urvashi Vaid stood up to speak to President Bush as he delivered his first major address on AIDS at the National Leadership Coalition on AIDS Conference outside of Washington, D.C.

Vaid was an invited guest of the conference, as were some 500 other attendees, including executive directors, powerful corporate heads and business and insurance industry chiefs.

The coast-to-coast media coverage of the incident presented a powerful image of Vaid's action: there she stood, almost directly in front of the President, holding high her sign, "Talk Is Cheap, AIDS Funding Is Not." The evening news shows captured Vaid calling out to Bush for increased leadership and funding.

It was an act that illustrated NGLTF's commitment to the needs and rights of gay and lesbian Americans and people with AIDS. Once again, personal courage and integrity, so much the heart and soul of NGLTF, rose to the forefront of the gay and lesbian movement. We believe Vaid's act will positively impact the effectiveness of our movement in changing mainstream society's opinion of us.

The President was interrupted near the end of his speech when it became apparent he was not going to announce any new initiatives for fighting the epidemic. Bush gave an excellent speech filled with calls for compassion and anti-discrimination protections, but left out any substantive action plan for fighting AIDS. As Rep. Henry Waxman said later, it was "kinder, gentler rhetoric."

Our community expects more than soundbites of compassion. Our community deserves the President's attention. And NGLTF was determined to get it. Behind a brief statement to President Bush was a call for real Presidential action:

- increase the 1991 Labor/HHS AIDS appropriations from the \$1.75 billion Administration level to the \$2.8 billion level that NGLTF and the National Organizations

Responding to AIDS (NORA) seek;

- end U.S. immigration, visitation and permanent residency policy that discriminates against people with AIDS and HIV;
- provide daily leadership and advocacy on AIDS;
- meet the demands posed by the epidemic's occurrence in already stigmatized and disenfranchised groups: people of color, the poor, the homeless, women, drug users and gay and bisexual men;
- make promising treatments available to all people with AIDS.

NGLTF stood up because we believe leadership requires tough choices—choices forced upon us by the homophobia of a culture that for a long time has denied us access through the front door of the White House, the Congress and the Supreme Court.

Vaid's action was but one part of a multi-faceted approach to activism that has always characterized NGLTF. Insider lobbying, grassroots organizing, direct action, public education and media advocacy all represent the commitment of NGLTF to the gay and lesbian movement.

That commitment is what causes us and every staff member of the Task Force to stand up to the invisibility of the closet, to the injustices of society, and, yes, to the President of the United States.