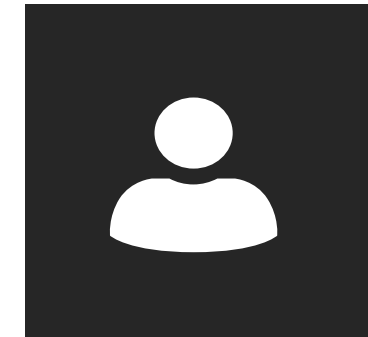


Black Activism & Churches during the HIV/AIDS Epidemic



PRESENTER:
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BACKGROUND:

- HIV/AIDS epidemic emerged in early 1980s, initially associated with gay men
- African Americans disproportionately affected: higher mortality rate, limited access to care
- Intersectionality (race, sexuality, class) shaped experiences of Black Americans
- Structural racism, medical mistrust, and economic inequality worsened outcomes

PRIMARY SOURCES:

- ACT UP Oral Histories (e.g., Kendall Thomas, Ron Medley interviews)
- Articles on church-based responses (e.g., DaKysha Moore)
- Philosophical accounts of empathy (Amy Coplan)

KEY FINDINGS:

- Black churches provided refuge and support during crisis
- “Silence = Death” campaign in NYC reclaimed trauma through protest art (pink triangle)
- Pastors in black communities were tested for HIV during church services to reduce stigma

Can Empathy Save Lives? The Power of Black Churches in the HIV/AIDS Epidemic



Faith-based approaches to activism helped reframe HIV/AIDS as a public health issue rather than a moral judgment.



ACT UP, a queer-led protest movement originating in NYC works swiftly to call for action and combat stigma during the AIDS epidemic.

“I was raised in a very fundamentalist, Christian family, but there was a component [...] of Christianity in the African American community that [understood] Christian theology as a theology of liberation.” - Kendall Thomas

A powerful critique on racial injustices in the AIDS crisis created by activist art collective Gran Fury.

AIDS: 1 in 61

One in every sixty-one babies in New York City is born with AIDS or born HIV antibody positive.

So why is the media telling us that heterosexuals aren't at risk?

Because these babies are black. These babies are Hispanic.

**Ignoring color ignores the facts of AIDS.
STOP RACISM: FIGHT AIDS.**



RESEARCH QUESTION

- How did Black AIDS activists centered in the New York area challenge stigmas and transform public attitudes towards HIV/AIDS in the 80s and 90s?
 - Highlights the unique intersectional lens of Black activists: race, religion, gender, and sexuality
 - Aims to uncover the role of religious spaces and activism in shifting narratives

SIGNIFICANCE

- Black AIDS activists in NYC led a unique and necessary form of activism grounded in community, intersectionality, and empathy through churches
- Exposes the epidemic to be as a social justice issue deeply tied to racial capitalism, medical neglect, and system inequality
- Intersectionality is a powerful framework in understanding inequity.
- Highlights black AIDS activist voices who are often marginalized in dominant HIV/AIDS narratives

ACTIVIST ORGANIZATIONS

- The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) was founded by queer folk in NY, March 1987 at the height of the AIDS crisis to publicly protest and demand policy change reforms to increase accessibility for treatment
- Gran Fury, formed in 1988 as the unofficial art collective of ACT UP. They used bold and striking images of protest and powerful statistics to expose government inaction and challenge stigma around HIV/AIDS



Take a picture to see the references