

Silence = Death protest slogan

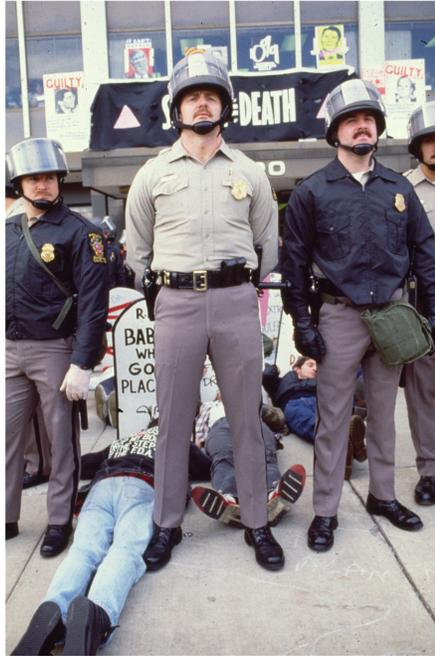


Protestors in front of the Department of Health and Human Services, during the national campaign to change the definition of AIDS, October 2, 1990. Courtesy Donna Binder

With chapters across the country, ACT UP held thousands of demonstrations between 1987 and 1996, including one at the Department of Health and Human Services to insist that women with AIDS receive care and treatment. Their actions transformed how scientists and politicians responded to the AIDS crisis.

ACT UP Examples

ACT UP Example 1



Police officers stand watch over activists at Storm the NIH protest, May 21, 1990. Courtesy Donna Binder

In one of its most dramatic and effective national protests, ACT UP chapters from across the country occupied the National Institutes of Health (NIH) on May 21, 1990. During Storm the NIH, protestors staged a “die in” and plastered buildings with signs and banners to illustrate their demands for governmental action on AIDS treatment.

Background Information Excerpt: “T&D [Treatment and Data Committee] claimed, first and foremost, that people with AIDS needed more drugs to treat illnesses associated with AIDS. In 1987 when ACT UP began, only one drug, azidothymidine (AZT), ...had received federal approval and was in use by doctors treating people with AIDS. T&D members implored the federal government and the pharmaceutical industry to research and produce more treatment options. To underscore their demands, T&D organized protests at key institutions in the medical establishment, including holding die-ins at pharmaceutical headquarters, splattering blood in front of the FDA, and occupying the National Institutes of Health....The protesters...creatively articulated their demands by covering the building that housed the FDA with posters, including one that read, ‘The Government Has Blood on Its Hands’....Almost 200 people were arrested in the daylong protest....Within two weeks of the FDA protest, the agency changed its regulations to allow for a speeded up drug evaluation process.”

[Source: Brier, Jennifer. *Infectious Ideas: U.S. Political Responses to the AIDS Crisis*. University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill. 2009. p.162, 166.]



ACT UP Examples

ACT UP Example 2



Protestors in front of the James A. Shannon Building, National Institutes of Health, 1990. Courtesy Donna Binder

In 1990, ACT UP protesters occupied the National Institutes of Health campus and called for scientists to develop more drugs for people with AIDS and the federal government to disseminate drugs equitably. Their efforts convinced policy makers to change regulations that resulted in a new regimen of drugs used to treat AIDS.

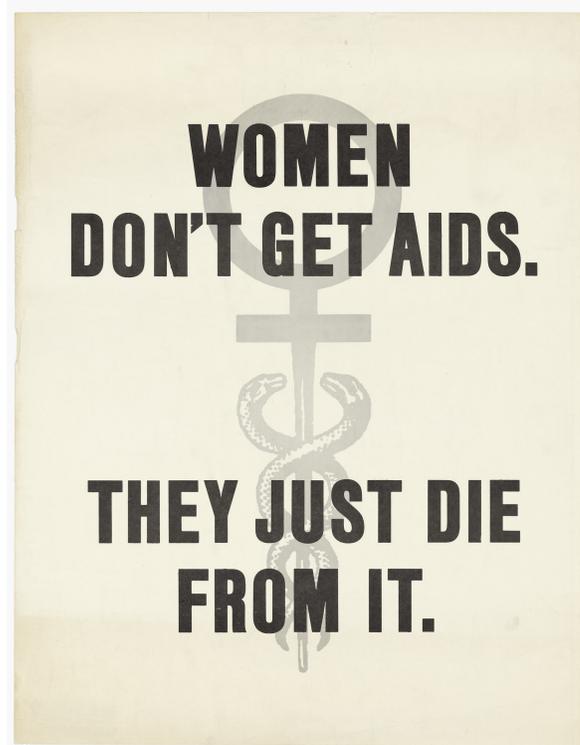
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ACT UP Example 3



Poster for the Department of Health and Human Services demonstration designed by ACT UP/DC Women's Committee, 1990. Courtesy National Library of Medicine

In October 1990, ACT UP descended upon Washington and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, carrying signs that demanded the formal definition of AIDS change to include women. Excluded from the diagnosis of having AIDS, women could not access potentially lifesaving care and treatment, even as they died of the disease.

Background Information Excerpt: "While both men and women could be infected with HIV in similar ways...the more advanced stages of AIDS did not manifest themselves in the same way in women as in men. For men, full-blown AIDS often caused KS, while women experienced bacterial pneumonia, pelvic inflammatory disease, and cervical cancer. This meant that...very few women were actually diagnosed with AIDS....(and) these women effectively were denied the Social Security benefits that men with AIDS had fought hard to secure....After a battle with the government over the wording of the definition of AIDS....the CDC announced that it planned to change the definition of AIDS to include cervical cancer, tuberculosis, and a T-cell (the cells that help ward off infection) count below 200. The new definition provided for the inclusion of not only women but also of poor people...who were more likely also to have tuberculosis."

[Source: Brier, Jennifer. *Infectious Ideas: U.S. Political Responses to the AIDS Crisis*. University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill. 2009. pp.172-73, 175.]



ACT UP Examples

ACT UP Example 4



Members of ACT UP/Philadelphia hold a mock funeral march in front of the governor's mansion, August 30, 2012. Courtesy Joe Hermitt, © 2012 The *Patriot-News*. All rights reserved. Reprinted and used with permission.

As AIDS increasingly affected people of color, gay and straight, those at the center of AIDS activism changed. In 2012, ACT UP/Philadelphia defiantly protested the state's decision to eliminate a cash assistance program used by people living in poverty to purchase treatment medications. The chapter remains active today because it connects AIDS activism to other pressing social issues, such as access to safe housing and quality healthcare, in both the United States and around the world.

Background Information Excerpt: "Concerned about the unavailability of housing for people with AIDS...the People with AIDS Housing Committee...formed to force the New York City government to provide sufficient housing for people with AIDS....The Housing Committee's first action was a protest against Donald Trump. ...In targeting Trump, the activists wanted to expose the tax breaks Trump received from the city as a luxury housing developer, and they demanded the same kind of support to be given to 'independent housing' for people with AIDS....On the Friday after Thanksgiving in 1988, the busiest shopping day of the year, the Housing Committee occupied the lobby of the Trump Tower and shut down the intersection at the corner of Fifty-sixth Street and Fifth Avenue in New York's midtown....In 1990, just two years after form as an ACT UP committee, the Housing Committee split from the main group to become Housing Works, an agency that provided housing to people with AIDS."

[Source: Brier, Jennifer. *Infectious Ideas: U.S. Political Responses to the AIDS Crisis*. University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill. 2009. p. 162, 166.]

