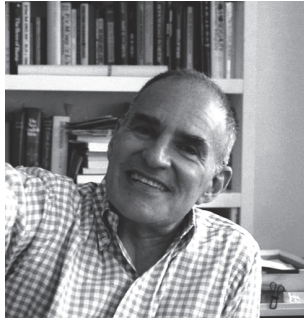


One Person Can Make a Difference

Larry Kramer vs. AIDS

“All power is
the willingness to
accept responsibility.”

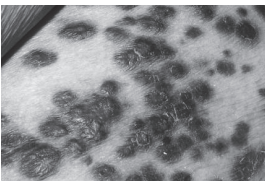
—Larry Kramer



Essential Questions

- What responsibility does the government have for ensuring the health and welfare of all citizens?
- What responsibility do individuals have for the welfare of others in society?
- How much influence should a government official's personal beliefs have on government policies?

A New Disease



A patient afflicted by Kaposi's Sarcoma

- 1980–1981—The Center for Disease Control in Atlanta received reports of young men in California and New York suffering from Kaposi's Sarcoma and Pneumocystis Pneumonia
- Both diseases hadn't been known to afflict otherwise healthy young men
- The illnesses did not respond to treatments
- The only thing the patients had in common was that they were gay

- 1982—Larry Kramer and several friends formed the Gay Men's Health Crisis organization to provide counseling, legal aid, volunteer assistance, and fundraising for AIDS research
- 1987—Three founding members—Paul Popham, Nathan Fain, and Paul Rapaport—died of AIDS



The Reagan Years



- 1980—Ronald Reagan elected President
- He was supported by conservatives and fundamentalist and evangelical Christian groups, including the Moral Majority and the Christian Coalition
- He appointed some people from these groups to high-ranking positions in his administration

Responses to the Epidemic



- **Jerry Falwell, head of the Moral Majority**
“AIDS is the wrath of God upon homosexuals.”



- **Pat Buchanan, Reagan's Director of Communications**
“...[Homosexuals] have declared war on nature, and now nature is exacting an awful retribution.”



- **C. Everett Koop, M. D., Reagan's Surgeon General**
“Most of the people that surrounded Reagan ... believed that anybody who had AIDS ought to die with it. That was God's punishment for them.”

Transmission of AIDS



Ryan White: hemophiliac



Intravenous drug users can get AIDS from sharing contaminated needles



Earvin "Magic" Johnson: heterosexual sex



Elizabeth Glaser—blood transfusion

Daughter Ariel—infected mother-to-child transmission through breast feeding

The Normal Heart

- 1985—Larry Kramer's play *The Normal Heart* premiered at New York's Public Theater
- The play focused on the early days of the AIDS epidemic and the impact the deaths of friends and lovers had on a group of gay men
- It also recounted the founding and early days of the Gay Men's Health Crisis

"*The Normal Heart* was never meant to be a subtle work. Larry Kramer wrote it in 1985 to be a shock to the system, an alarm siren, a blunt instrument to bludgeon Ed Koch's New York, Ronald Reagan's Washington, the indifferent press and complacent medical industry into acknowledging the mysterious disease destroying gay men."

—Newsday review

Act Up



Scenes from a 1989 ACT UP "die-in" protest in San Francisco

- 1987—Kramer formed ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) to demand more extensive action against the disease
- 1987—Held several demonstrations to condemn minimal government subsidies for AIDS research and lack of access to experimental drugs
- 1988—Occupied the NY Stock Exchange to protest the high cost of AIDS medication (\$10,000 per year)
- 1988—Shut down the Food and Drug Administration because of its slow process for approving new AIDS drugs
- 1990—"Day of Desperation" held, in which banners were displayed in Grand Central Station in NYC that read "Money for AIDS, not for War" and "One AIDS death every 8 minutes"

A Letter from Larry Kramer



"Thank you for coming to see our play.
Please know that everything in *The Normal Heart* happened.
These were and are real people who lived and spoke and died...
Four members of the original cast died as well...
Please know that AIDS is a worldwide plague.
Please know that there is no cure.
Please know that after all this time, the amount of money being
spent to find a cure is still miniscule...
Please know that here in America case numbers continue to rise in
every category. In much of the rest of the world—Russia, India,
Southeast Asia, Africa—the numbers of the infected and the dying
are so grotesquely high that they are rarely acknowledged.
Please know that most medications for HIV/AIDS are inhumanly
expensive and that government funding for the poor to obtain them
is dwindling and often unavailable.
Please know that an awful lot of people have needlessly died and
will continue to needlessly die because of any and all of the above.
Please know that the world has suffered at the very least some
75 million infections and 35 million deaths. When the action of
the play that you have just seen begins, there were 41."



Dr. Anthony Fauci, Head of AIDS
research, National Institute of Health



Kramer at an ACT UP event

"ACT UP put medical treatment in the hands of the patients. And that is
the way it ought to be... There is no question in my mind that Larry helped
change medicine in this country. And he changed it for the better.
In American medicine, there are two eras: Before Larry and After Larry."
