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AIDS and People of Color . . .

Past Time for Action

During the early 80s, the federal government, the American medical establishment, and the media viewed AIDS as just a gay disease, just a case of chickens coming home to roost for a deprived subcommunity.

Things have changed somewhat. There is some federal money for AIDS education and research. A number of celebrities have devoted their time and resources to the fight against AIDS. The media has brought knowledge of the syndrome into many, if not most, American homes. Of course this is not enough, but it is a start.

FOUR OF EVERY TEN AMERICANS
WITH AIDS IS NOT WHITE

At the same time, however, an interesting phenomenon developed. AIDS was--and still is--perceived as a white, gay male disease. I argue that this is partially a function of the desire of activists to make AIDS seem like a respectable disease. That is, a disease prevalent among affluent white men. The reality is, however, that four out of every ten Americans diagnosed with AIDS is non-white. Specifically, 25% of people with AIDS are Black, and 14% are Latino. Remember that Afro-Americans and Latinos comprise only 11.7 and 6.4% of the population respectively.

The figures are even more stark for Afro-American women and children. At this time, 52% of women with AIDS are Black. Fifty-nine percent of the pediatric AIDS cases are Black.

So the next question is, Why? Why are people of color and specifically Blacks contracting AIDS at such an accelerated rate? The most obvious answer is that Black and Latino people are found in every risk group: gay and bisexual men, I.V. drug users, heterosexual contacts with people with AIDS, hemophiliacs, babies of women with AIDS, and recipients of blood products. Also a second reason may be the long-established trend for infectious diseases to lodge in poor, non-white populations--due primarily to economic and nutritional differences.

Also let's remember that people of color have a long history of exploitation and neglect by the American medical establishment. So the problem has been exacerbated because educational programs have been primarily directed at white communities. Current statistics reveal that AIDS is quickly becoming the leading cause of death of young men in Harlem. AIDS is also the second highest cause of death for New York City women aged 30 to 34. Most of these are women of color. Despite these facts, as of October 1986 there were no prevention and education programs in
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Coming Out . . .

Another Personal View

If you are a CGLA veteran or are already an openly gay person, skip this. But if you are a person, perhaps new in town, perhaps not, who feels that you have "abnormal" or "different" attractions to someone of your own gender, read this. If you are a guy who steals furtive, longing glances at your male friends or a woman who dreams of a seemingly unattainable love with your suitemate, read this. If you exist only as a facade, if you're hiding, if you're wondering if you're alone, if you're afraid, read this.

In Henrik Ibsen's famous play, "A Doll's House," a disillusioned husband is "explaining" to his wife that her "sacred duties" are to be "a wife and mother before you are anything else." She replies:

I have other duties equally sacred...my duties to myself....

I believe I am first of all a human being, just as much as you--or at any rate that I must try to become one. Oh, I know very well that most people agree with you...but what people say and what the books say is no longer enough for me. I have to think about these things myself and see if I can't find the answers.... I have to make up my mind who is right, society or I.

Brothers and sisters out there, the answers are there: You are right, society is wrong. But society can be changed, one by one, person by person, parent by
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