

**Social Problems: The HIV/AIDS Epidemic**  
Hobart and William Smith Colleges  
Department of Anthropology and Sociology

R. Ruth Linden  
Soc. 258  
Spring 1990  
T, Th: 1:30 p.m. - 3:15 p.m.

### **I. Course description**

The HIV/AIDS epidemic in the United States is nearly a decade old. Its impact on our era--on ideas about illness and death, on tensions between public health institutions and civil liberties, on meanings of sexuality and sexual differences--has been dramatic and will escalate as we enter the 21st century.

In the United States, HIV/AIDS has decimated a generation of gay men, unleashing a second epidemic of victim-blaming. In Kinshasa, Zaire, between 55 and 100 new cases of AIDS are diagnosed per 100,000 adults annually. By comparison, in New York City, the annual incidence rate in 1986 was 110 per 100,000 men and 12 per 100,000 women. In years to come, poor women and children of color will be hardest hit. By 1991 25% of all hospital beds in New York City will be occupied by an AIDS patient.

The epidemic is a mirror of our times. AIDS challenges each of us to confront the homophobia, racism, denial and fear at the heart of American culture. It reflects the limits and politics of scientific knowledge and clinical medicine, as well as the dismal failure of federal policy making under the Reagan and Bush administrations. But at the community level, thousands of People with AIDS (PWAs) and their allies have mobilized to demand responsive policies: equal access to effective and compassionate health services, timely drug trials and protection from discrimination. AIDS has summoned both the best and the worst from the American people.

Why has it taken nearly a decade for the subject of AIDS to enter the Hobart and William Smith Colleges curriculum? How is this silence connected to other culturally mandated silences? Why is adequate health care in the United States a privilege for the affluent, not a constitutionally-guaranteed right? (Along with South Africa, America is the only Western, industrialized nation without a national health service or universal insurance program.)

What is this epidemic? How has it been defined and redefined in popular media accounts? This course will explore the varied discourses through which HIV/AIDS has been constructed and the contested meanings of the epidemic.

### **II. Required texts**

There is a substantial amount of reading required for this course, especially at the beginning of the term. I've chosen our texts because I think they are fascinating and provocative works. I hope you will be intrigued and excited by them. But consider your schedule carefully. If you decide to take this course, please be sure that you are prepared to complete reading assignments of at least fifty pages per class meeting, and sometimes considerably more.

There are six required books:

Adams, Jad, *AIDS: The HIV Myth*  
Crimp, Douglas, ed., *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism*  
Monette, Paul, *Borrowed Time*  
*AIDS and the Third World* (a Panos Institute Dossier)  
Richardson, Diane, *Women and AIDS*  
Shilts, Randy, *And the Band Played On*

### **III. Course outline**

As with all my courses, "The HIV/AIDS Epidemic" is experimental in structure and content. The outline that follows is subject to revision, depending on our pacing and other unforeseen circumstances. It is your responsibility to provide me with ongoing feedback as the term progresses. Please don't wait until the course has ended to voice your suggestions. I welcome your criticisms, both positive and negative, while there is time enough to act on them!

March 27 Course Introduction: "An Epidemic of Signification"

#### **I. The First Five Years: Constructing and Reconstructing AIDS**

March 29 Shilts, *And the Band Played On*, pp. xi-79.

April 3 Shilts, pp. 80-262.

April 5 Shilts, pp. 263-348.  
Video: "AIDS Quarterly" (Fall 1989)

April 10 Shilts, pp. 349-503.

April 12 Shilts, pp. 505-624.

#### **II. Sign/Signifier/Signified: Deconstructing AIDS**

April 17 Crimp, *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism*, pp. 3-16; Grover, "AIDS: Keywords," pp. 17-30; and Treichler, "AIDS, Homophobia, and Biomedical Discourse: An Epidemic of Signification," pp. 31-70, all in Crimp, ed., *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism*

April 19 Crimp, "How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic," pp. 237-271; and "PWA Coalition Portfolio," pp. 147-168, both in Crimp, ed., *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism*

### III. Global Politics: The AIDS Pandemic

- April 24 *AIDS and The Third World*, pp. i-66.
- April 26 *AIDS and The Third World*, pp. 67-179.  
\*critical review of *And the Band Played On* due.

### IV. Silence = Death: Women and AIDS

- May 2 Richardson, *Women and AIDS*, pp. 1-101; Shaw, "Preventing AIDS Among Women: The Role of Community Organizing," *Socialist Review* 100 (October-December 1988), pp. 76-92 (hand out and on reserve).
- May 4 Richardson, *Women and AIDS*, pp. 102-178; Ports, "Needed (For Women and Children)," pp. 169-176; and Leigh, "Further Violations of Our Rights," pp. 177-181, both in Crimp, ed., *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism*.  
  
Recommended: Treichler, "AIDS, Gender and Biomedical Discourse," pp. 190-266 in Fee and Fox, *AIDS: The Burdens of History* (on reserve); "A Strange Virus of Unknown Origin"
- May 8 Adams, *AIDS: The HIV Myth*, pp. vii-69.
- May 10 Adams, pp. 70-145.  
  
AIDS poster or project due, produced by learning collectives.
- May 15 Adams, pp. 146-186.
- May 17 Adams, pp. 187-223.

### VI. The Lived Experience of HIV/AIDS

- May 22 Monette, *Borrowed Time*, pp. 1-104.  
Film: "Common Threads"
- May 24 Monette, pp. 105-240.
- May 29 Monette, pp. 241-342.  
  
AIDS Diary and analysis due
- May 31 Final class/Wrap-up

### IV. Course Structure

We will employ two different forms of group process in order to create a relaxed and hospitable context for learning. First, as often as possible, we will meet for class discussion in three sections, rather than as a large group. This will enable everyone to participate more comfortably, as well as help us get to know each other better. Two of these groups will be facilitated by students who have been working closely with me to plan our class this term. I will lead the third group.

Second, the class will be divided into learning collectives. Over the course of the term, each of you will work with five other class members as part of a small group. One required course assignment will be made to the small groups.

### V. Course Requirements

(1) Regular attendance at class meetings, engaged participation in discussions and careful readings of all assigned materials are expected.

(2) Critical review of *And the Band Played On*. Length: 5-7 pages, approximately 1500 words. Due Thursday, 26 April.

(3) AIDS poster or project, produced by learning collectives.  
Due for class presentation on Thursday, 10 May.

(4) AIDS diary and analysis. Due Tuesday, 29 May. I will give you a handout explaining this assignment.

(5) Learning analysis (5 pages), due at 10 a.m. on Tuesday, 5 June in my office. To pass the course, all papers must be handed in on time. No late papers accepted! No incompletes will be granted.