

# FIGHT BACK, FIGHT AIDS: 15 YEARS OF ACT UP

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Regie: James Wentzy

USA 2002

Länge 75 Min.  
Format Digi Beta  
Farbe

## Stabliste

Konzept, Schnitt,  
Mischung, Produzent James Wentzy

## Produktion

James Wentzy  
12 Wooster St.  
USA-New York  
NY 10013  
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actupny@panix.com

## Weltvertrieb

siehe Produktion

Kompilationsfilm



## FIGHT BACK, FIGHT AIDS: 15 YEARS OF ACT UP

2002 gab es die „AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power“, kurz ACT UP, seit 15 Jahren. Der allgemeine Bewusstseinswandel zum Thema AIDS hängt wesentlich mit der Initiative dieser Gruppe zusammen. Ein Umdenken war dringend notwendig, denn die staatliche Gesundheitsvorsorge hatte angesichts der Gefahr durch den HI-Virus weitgehend versagt. Vereinzelt war AIDS erstmals 1950 in Zentralafrika festgestellt worden. Zwischen 1970 und 1975 verbreitete sich der HI-Virus über ganz Afrika, bis er 1975 über Haiti in die USA eingeschleppt wurde. 1981 wurden in den USA erste Krankheitsfälle beschrieben, die mit einer HIV-Infektion in Verbindung gebracht wurden. 1982 wurden in Europa erste Krankheitsfälle festgestellt. Doch auch die rasante Ausbreitung des Virus änderte nichts daran, dass AIDS lange Zeit ausschließlich im Zusammenhang mit Homosexualität thematisiert wurde. Das begann sich mit der ersten ACT-UP-Aktion zu ändern, die im März 1987 in der New Yorker Wall Street stattfand. Anlass der Demonstration war die Kursentwicklung bei den Aktien großer Pharmakonzerne, die in HIV-Tests und AIDS-Medikamenten ein hoch profitables Geschäftsfeld entdeckt hatten. In seinem Kompilationsfilm präsentiert James Wentzy die wichtigsten Ereignisse aus den zurückliegenden 15 Jahren. An ihnen lässt sich nicht nur die Geschichte eines Netzwerks ablesen, das mittlerweile eine Vielzahl von Selbsthilfezentren, Aktionsgruppen und Medieninitiativen verbindet, sondern auch die Tatsache, dass trotz eines erfolgten Bewusstseinswandels die Aufklärungsarbeit unvermindert weitergehen muss.

## FIGHT BACK, FIGHT AIDS: 15 YEARS OF ACT UP

The year 2002 marked 15 years since the inception of the „AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power“, in short, ACT UP. The change in public awareness vis-à-vis the subject of AIDS is largely a result of the efforts of this group. It was high time for a re-think, since government health programmes had largely failed when it came to trying to convince people to take precautions against the danger of the HI virus. Individual cases of AIDS were first recorded in 1950 in Central Africa. The HI virus spread throughout Africa between 1970-75 until it came to the USA via Haiti. In the USA, the first cases of a disease which could be attributed to the HIV infection were described in 1981, and

in 1982 the first incidence of the disease was discovered in Europe. Although the virus was to spread rapidly, the belief that AIDS was exclusively an illness related to homosexuality was prevalent for a very long time. This began to change after the first ACT UP event, which took place in March 1987 in New York's Wall Street. The demonstration was instigated by the rise in share prices for big pharmaceutical firms that had discovered a highly profitable market in HIV tests and AIDS medication. In his compilation film, James Wentzy charts the most important events during 15 years of this organisation's history. This is not only the story of a network which now boasts a large number of self-help centres, action groups and media initiatives; it also bears testimony to the fact that, in spite of the change in public awareness, there is still no end in sight to the need to inform and enlighten.



James Wentzy

### Biografie

Geboren am 21. 10 1952 in Bookings, South Dakota. Lebt seit 1976 in New York. Arbeitete zwischen 1980 und 1990 als Fotograf. 1990 HIV-positiv getestet, seither bei ACT UP, New York, aktiv. Seit 1991 Producer und Regisseur der wöchentlich ausgestrahlten 30-Minuten-Sendung „AIDS Community Television“. FIGHT BACK, FIGHT AIDS: 15 YEARS OF ACT UP ist sein erster langer Dokumentarfilm.

### Biography

Born in Bookings, South Dakota on 21.10.1952, he moved to New York in 1972. He worked as a photographer between 1980-1990. He tested HIV positive in 1990 and has since been an active member of ACT UP in New York. In 1991, he began producing and directing the weekly 30-minute advice programme, "AIDS Community Television". FIGHT BACK, FIGHT AIDS: 15 YEARS OF ACT UP, is his first feature-length documentary.

### Biographie

Né le 21-10-1952 à Bookings, South Dakota. Vit à New York depuis 1976. Travaille comme photographe de 1980 à 1990. Apprend sa séropositivité en 1990 et milite depuis au sein du mouvement ACT UP, à New York. Produit et réalise depuis 1991 une émission hebdomadaire de 30 minutes d'informations et de conseils, « AIDS Community Television ». FIGHT BACK, FIGHT AIDS : 15 YEARS OF ACT UP est son premier long métrage documentaire.

### FIGHT BACK, FIGHT AIDS: 15 YEARS OF ACT UP

En 2002, le mouvement ACT UP, ou « AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power », fêtait ses 15 ans d'existence. L'évolution générale de la prise de conscience au sujet du sida dépend essentiellement des initiatives de ce groupe. Il était urgent de repenser toute la situation car les services de santé nationaux avaient pour la plupart fait la preuve de leur incapacité face au danger représenté par le VIH. Dès 1950, on constatait des cas isolés de sida en Afrique centrale. Entre 1970 et 1975, le virus se propagea dans toute l'Afrique avant d'atteindre les Etats-Unis, via Haïti, en 1975. En 1981, les premiers cas de maladie en rapport avec l'infection virale furent décrits aux Etats-Unis tandis qu'en Europe, on constatait les premiers cas en 1982. La propagation extrêmement rapide du virus ne changea toutefois rien au fait que le sida soit considéré pendant longtemps comme une maladie uniquement en rapport avec l'homosexualité. Les choses se mirent à changer en mars 1987, avec la première action d'ACT UP, dans la Wall Street de New York. La manifestation fut déclenchée en raison de la flambée des cours boursiers des grands trusts pharmaceutiques qui avaient découvert le profit potentiel lié aux tests VIH et aux médicaments contre le sida. Dans son film de compilation, James Wentzy présente les événements les plus importants des 15 années d'existence du mouvement. Cela permet non seulement de déchiffrer l'histoire de tout un réseau regroupant entre-temps une multitude de centres d'entraide, de groupes d'action et d'initiatives médiatiques, mais aussi de constater que le travail d'information est loin d'être terminé, même si la prise de conscience a grandement évolué.





# Fight Back, Fight AIDS: 15 Years of ACT UP

**USA, 2002**  
video, 75', col.

regia/director  
**James Wentzy**

montaggio/editing  
**James Wentzy**

fotografia/photography  
**James Wentzy**

produttore/producer  
**James Wentzy**

12, Wooster St.  
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## Combatti, combatti l'AIDS: 15 anni di ACT UP

Nel 2002 si festeggiano i 15 anni dell'associazione AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power, (ACT UP). Il cambiamento dell'atteggiamento dell'opinione pubblica riguardo all'AIDS è il risultato degli sforzi di questo gruppo. Era il momento di una nuova riflessione visti i fallimenti dei programmi statali di prevenzione. Casi individuali di AIDS si erano propagati in Africa negli anni 1970-75 fino ad arrivare negli Stati Uniti via Haiti. Anche se il virus si è diffuso rapidamente, la convinzione che l'AIDS fosse una malattia legata esclusivamente all'omosessualità ha regnato per lungo tempo. Questa situazione ha iniziato a cambiare dopo il primo evento di ACT UP, nel marzo del 1987 a New York in Wall Street. La manifestazione fu provocata dal rialzo azionario delle grandi case farmaceutiche che avevano colto la possibilità di aumentare i profitti grazie ai test per l'HIV e le medicine contro l'AIDS. Questo film ripercorre gli eventi più importanti nei 15 anni di storia dell'organizzazione.

## Biofilmografia

James Wentzy è nato a Bookings, South Dakota nel 1952. Si è trasferito a New York nel 1972, dove ha lavorato come fotografo tra il 1980 e il 1990. Nel 1990 è risultato positivo al test dell'HIV e da allora è diventato un attivista di ACT UP a New York. Nel 1991 ha iniziato la carriera di produttore e regista per il programma settimanale di 30 minuti *AIDS Community Television*. Questo è il suo primo lungometraggio documentaristico.



## Fight Back, Fight AIDS: 15 Years of ACT UP

*The year 2002 marked 15 years since the inception of the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, (ACT UP). The change in public awareness vis-à-vis the subject of AIDS is largely a result of the efforts of this group. It was high time for a re-think, since government health programmes had largely failed when it came to trying to convince people to take precautions against the danger of HI virus. Individual cases of AIDS spread throughout Africa between 1970-75 until it came to the USA via Haiti. Although the virus was to spread rapidly, the belief that AIDS was exclusively an illness related to homosexuality was prevalent for a long time. This began to change after the first ACT UP event, which took place in March 1987 in New York's Wall Street. The demonstration was instigated by the rise in share prices for big pharmaceutical firms that had discovered a highly profitable market in HIV tests and AIDS medication. This film charts the most important events during 15 years of this organisation's history.*

## Biofilmography

*James Wentzy was born in Bookings, South Dakota in 1952. He moved to New York in 1972, where he worked as a photographer between 1980-1990. In 1990 he is tested HIV positive and since then he has been an active member of ACT UP in New York. In 1991 he began producing and directing the weekly 30 minute-programme AIDS Community Television. This is his first feature-length documentary.*



[< Catalog Notes](#)

## Festival Program

> [NY, NY - Documentary]



### **FIGHT BACK, FIGHT AIDS: 15 YEARS OF ACT UP**

[FIGHT]

**Director:** James Wentzy

U.S.A.

2002

75 min

Color



Screening Schedule

Wed, May 7 / 4:00pm

Integrated Studios

\$10.00

WAIT LIST

Sat, May 10 / 4:15pm

Tribeca Film Center

\$10.00

WAIT LIST

[< Short Program Note](#)

[> Director's Bio](#)

[> Director's Statement](#)

[> Cast And Credits](#)

[> Film Contact Information](#)

It wasn't until nearly 1987 that public perception about AIDS being a disease of homosexual men started to ever-so-slowly shift, and if it weren't for the militant (and often controversial) activism of the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, perceptions might not have shifted for much longer. This insightful compilation documentary recounts the group's 15-year history and shows how it has grown in scope and sophistication without losing sight of its activist ideals.

[< Full Program Note](#)

In March 1987, the first AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) event took place on Wall Street. In the 15 years since the protest that shut down the world's financial center, ACT UP has been at the forefront of public awareness. Their demonstrations, die-ins, political funerals, marches, and speeches were key in propelling issues related to HIV/AIDS into major political and international topics. ACT UP member and AIDS video activist James Wentzy has constructed a vivid compilation documentary with *Fight Back, Fight AIDS: 15 Years of ACT UP*. The powerful clips depict the multiple bold events that ACT UP has staged, including: the inspiring First ACT UP action on Wall Street protesting

the profiteering of the pharmaceutical companies that made AIDS-related drugs; National Nine Days of Rage, in which more than 50 ACT UP chapters congregated on the New York state capital to protest AIDS policies (or the lack thereof) involving IV drug use, homophobia, people of color, women, prison programs, and children with AIDS; and intense coverage of political funerals of ACT UP and affinity group The Marys, which included carrying an open coffin from Washington Square to the New York Republican Party headquarters on West 43rd Street, as well as an open casket political funeral in front of the White House. With fierce images and speeches, including many poignant ones by film historian and ACT UP pioneer Vito Russo, *Fight Back, Fight AIDS* is a dynamic alternative historical record of the queer political landscape, HIV/AIDS, and AIDS activist video. – David Kwok | Tribeca Film Festival Programmer |

< [Director's Bio](#)

## James Wentzy

James Wentzy was born October 21, 1952, in Brookings, South Dakota, and has lived in New York City since 1976. He has been a member of ACT UP New York since 1990. As a producer/ director for DIVA TV (Damned Interfering Video Activists) since 1991, he has documented more than 700 hours of videotape and edited more than 160 video documentary programs for a 30-minute weekly series telecast in New York City entitled AIDS Community Television, which documents community responses to the AIDS crisis. Wentzy is also a video archivist for the Estate Project's AIDS Activist Video Preservation Project for the New York Public Library. *Fight Back, Fight AIDS* is his first feature-length documentary. He is HIV positive.



> [Director's Statement](#)

"Over the span of its 15-year history, ACT UP (the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) has helped to transform the nation's consciousness about HIV/AIDS, and made activism a vital part of the AIDS political landscape. Comprehensively documented by media activists and video collectives, the bold strategies, media savvy, and decidedly queer wit of ACT UP remains a fresh source of inspiration to today's artists and activists through the invaluable trove of images sampled in this dynamic program of AIDS activist video."

- written by *Ioannis Mookas* for *MIX 2002*

< [Cast And Credits](#)

**Producer:** James Wentzy

**Archival Documentary Video Footage:** Catherine Gund, Julie Clark, John Schabel, Tim McCarthy, Andrew Chang, Elaine Angelopoulos, Tony Arena, Dean Lance, James Wentzy

< [Film Contact Information](#)

## Festival Program

> [NY, NY - Documentary]



### **FIGHT BACK, FIGHT AIDS: 15 YEARS OF ACT UP**

[FIGHT]

#### **Print Source and Press Contact**

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**Distributor Source** *to be announced soon*







Fight Back, Fight Aids: 15 Years Of Act Up □



di James Wentzy  
USA 2002, Beta, 75'

Nel 2002 *ACT UP* ha compiuto 15 anni. Organizzazione nata a New York sull'onda della rabbia della comunità gay per le politiche inefficaci e dannose dell'amministrazione Reagan a fronte dell'emergenza AIDS, ACT UP ha sempre compiuto azioni eclatanti: dalla prima dimostrazione davanti a Wall Street per protestare per l'alto costo di test e farmaci alla partecipazione all'ultima conferenza mondiale sull'AIDS tenutasi a Barcellona. James Wentzy, fotografo-regista e membro attivo di ACT UP New York dal 1991, ha raccolto tutta la documentazione video delle attività del gruppo mostrando i diversi temi e obiettivi delle campagne succedutesi nel corso degli anni. La storia di una rete internazionale che ha portato alla creazione di centri d'aiuto, gruppi d'azione e iniziative mediatiche e che ci ricorda quanto sia necessario continuare a fare una corretta informazione su HIV-AIDS. Tra le testimonianze più vibranti un discorso dell'autore de *Lo Schermo Velato* Vito Russo.

**Proiezioni:**

**Martedì 3 Giugno - ore 15:00 - cinema PASQUIROLO - Milano**



## Fight Back, Fight AIDS: 15 Years of ACT UP on Video

If the traditional documentary—one with carefully scripted voiceovers and thought-provoking insight—is your cup of tea, FIGHT BACK, FIGHT AIDS: 15 YEARS OF ACT UP ON VIDEO might best be kept for a rainy day. That's because it's an

actual recapturing of queer history, offering neither narrator nor scandal. Yet it is a documentary because it captures *our* memories of *our* friends and lovers who fought for *our* political rights regarding what used to be *our* disease.



June 25 at 6:30PM  
Herbst Theatre  
\$9 FIGH25H



James Wentzy's in-your-face FIGHT BACK, FIGHT AIDS is a compilation of live footage documenting the first ACT UP meeting in 1987 on New York City's Wall Street and continues to 2002. Amateur video recording—at the demonstration level and from the private, behind-the-scenes meetings and training—reveals the astonishing camaraderie that united a politically enraged community, regardless of age, race, ethnicity, or gender.

Recognizable faces among the hundreds of ACT UP activists, timelessly captured over the 15 years of footage, are likely to be moving. Particularly noteworthy is seeing activist and author Vito Russo issue a speech equating AIDS to war then demanding to know how the two landscapes differ.

Whether or not your own political views are aligned with ACT UP's today, this infinitely relevant political group taught us to fight back against government complacency, to protest the high costs of pharmaceutical drugs, and to simply ask others: Where is your rage?

**FIGHT BACK, FIGHT AIDS: 15 YEARS OF ACT UP ON VIDEO** dir James Wentzy  
2002 USA 75 min video

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# OUTFEST 2003

THE 21ST L.A. GAY & LESBIAN  
FILM FESTIVAL

## Feature Programs

### Fight Back, Fight AIDS: 15 Years of ACT UP

DIR: James Wentzy, USA, 2002, video, 75 min.



ACT UP, the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, was formed 15 years ago in response to the inconceivable paralysis of the American establishment in responding to AIDS. Their mission: to turn anger, fear and grief into action. With smart marketing campaigns, media savvy and creative civil disobedience, ACT UP energized queer politics and brought radical activism to the forefront of LGBT culture. Using his own video documentation and archival footage - granting access to the initial organizing meetings, die-ins on the White House lawn, political funerals in the streets of New York City and one of Vito Russo's final great speeches - director James Wentzy has constructed a valuable and inspirational history of ACT UP that premiered at the Berlin Film Festival. —KMS

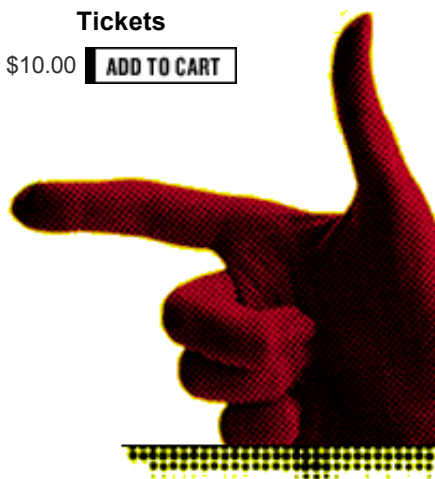
**IN COLLABORATION WITH:** NATIONAL GAY AND LESBIAN TASK FORCE

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Date and Time	Venue	Tickets
Sat Jul 12, 9:30 pm	DGA 2	\$10.00 <a href="#">ADD TO CART</a>

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Reel Affirmations 13

Washington DC's Thirteenth International Gay & Lesbian Film Festival

<http://www.reelaffirmations.org/filmfest/film.cfm?filmID=333>



## Fight Back, Fight AIDS: 15 Years of ACT UP

Sunday, October 19

6:00 PM ¥ JCC Theater ¥ \$9

ÒWe are angry, we want action!Ó Last year the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) celebrated its fifteenth anniversary. It was March 1987 when ACT UP staged its first protest on Wall Street to draw attention to the profiteering of AIDS drug manufacturers. Ever since, ACT UP has held a prominent position in HIV/AIDS public and political activism. Through ACT UP's own video-documenting affinity group DIVA TV, many public spectacles protesting bureaucratic inaction are captured and shown in this documentary. There is no narration or script, only a timeline. This film powerfully offers the real thing: archival footage of marches, protests, speeches and meetings, including a magnificent speech by Vito Russo on the similarities between AIDS and war. Touching, factual, political and angry, this documentary shows the contribution ACT UP has made in fighting the scourge of AIDS. Dir. James Wentzy, 2002, USA, video, 75 min.

More than just a historical account of ACT UP, this film shows how we can turn anger, fear and grief into action for positive change.

Sponsored by: Prevention Works!, Whitman-Walker Clinic

Community Partner: American University GLBT Resource Center