

# Detailed Scenes and Transcription

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

video documentary by James Wentzy

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### **ONE-MINUTE PRELUDE**

CHANTING: "ACT UP, FIGHT BACK, FIGHT AIDS"

VITO RUSSO: "Living with AIDS is like living through a war which is happening only for those people who happen to be in the trenches. Every time a shell explodes, you look around and you discover that you've lost more of your friends, but nobody else notices."

CHANTING: "No more business as usual"

POLICE: "You are all under arrest for disorderly conduct."

DAVID ROBINSON: "Yeah, we have a dead body here, we have a corpse. Why the hell do we have to hide a corpse?"

CHANTING: "ACT UP, FIGHT BACK, FIGHT AIDS"

RON GOLDBERG: "So our queens... saw their queens...."

TITLES:

**FIGHT BACK  
FIGHT AIDS  
15 YEARS OF ACT UP**

COUNTDOWN: ONE AIDS DEATH EVERY \_\_ MINUTES



**TITLE: ACT UP**

### **FIRST ACT UP DEMONSTRATION**

#### **WALL STREET March 24, 1987**

*Outraged by the government's mismanagement of the AIDS crisis, concerned individuals unite to form the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power. ACT UP's first demonstration takes place three weeks later on March 24th 1987 on Wall Street, the financial center, to protest the profiteering of pharmaceutical companies (especially Burroughs Wellcome, manufacturer of AZT). Seventeen people are arrested. Shortly after the demonstration, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announces it will shorten its drug approval process by two years. | Capsule History |*

#### **[Transcript]**

CHANTING: WE ARE ANGRY, WE WANT ACTION, WE ARE ANGRY WE WANT ACTION.

CHANTING: RELEASE THE DRUG, RELEASE THE DRUG, RELEASE THE DRUG.

## **FIRST YEAR ANNIVERSARY WALL STREET ACTION, March 24, 1988**

*To celebrate our first anniversary, ACT UP returns to Wall Street. More than 100 activists are arrested; ACT UP receives major media coverage and issues central to the AIDS crisis are reported. The concept of "AIDS activism" gains credibility.*

CHANTING: AIDS KILLS WOMEN, STOP YOUR PROFITEERING.

POLICE: Watch your back.

WOMAN: Sit down. [SITTING DOWN IN STREET]

POLICE THROUGH MEGAPHONE: You are interfering with vehicular traffic. If you refuse to move, you'll be placed under arrest for disorderly conduct. I'm ordering you to please leave at this time.

CHANTING: NO MORE BUSINESS AS USUAL, NO MORE BUSINESS AS USUAL.

POLICE: All right, you are all under arrest for disorderly conduct. If you resist arrest, an additional charge of resisting arrest will be lodged against you.

CHANTING: NO MORE BUSINESS AS USUAL, NO MORE BUSINESS AS USUAL.

## **Demonstration for Needle Exchange (ADAPT) New York City May 1, 1988**

CHANTING: ACT UP, FIGHT BACK, FIGHT AIDS.

[SIRENS]

## **PRE-ACTION ACT UP MEETING: CHANTS REHEARSAL March 26, 1989**

RON GOLDBERG: There are a couple of tricky rhythms here. You will turn to the second side of your hymnal, under Women's Issues. This is how this goes. "Despite what you've heard, this is the word, women with AIDS exist. Gay or straight, we must educate, women with AIDS exist." [APPLAUSE]. One, two, three....

GROUP: Despite what you've heard, this is the word, women with AIDS exist. Gay or straight, we must educate, women with AIDS exist.

RON GOLDBERG: Don't slur that. You'll also note that this works great for teenagers with AIDS, Latinos... it goes for a lot of things. We can use this chant a lot to cover minority issues that are not addressed specifically.

MALE: The token chant. [LAUGHTER].

RON GOLDBERG: The token chant. [CRINGES] And the cameras are on.

[BREAK]

RON GOLDBERG: Also, on that same side, under the old favorites okay this thing called "Cut the Stalling, Cut the Red Tape." Now, this has percussion. Well, actually, it's more syncopation. It's "Cut the stalling, cut the red tape, cut the stalling, cut the red tape." The tune is "Row, Row, Row Your Boat". We will not do it as a Round initially. [LAUGHTER]. But, we will.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Save it for jail.

RON GOLDBERG: Save it for jail. [LAUGHTER]. Really, this will drive them crazy. [APPLAUSE] Let them out, let them out. [LAUGHTER] Okay, this goes "bury, bury, bury your head, that's a (Oh God) no money, no care, no meds anywhere, AIDS is but a dream. Again. Bury, bury, bury your head, that's a , no money, no care, no meds anywhere, AIDS is but a dream." [APPLAUSE].

And finally, I made a promise to the floor last week, and I didn't come through on this, and I want to do it now, which is this side of the room's going to say, "healthcare is a right, healthcare is a right." And this side is going to get say, "pump up the budget." [APPLAUSE]. There's a divide here and those over here can go either way. So, over here, it goes "healthcare is a right, healthcare is a right. Pump up the budget, pump up the budget."

[BREAK]

MALE: Any group without a support person?

MALE: No. This is someone who will be assigned to a specific Affinity Group.

[BREAK]

ELLEN SPIRO: DIVA TV is Damned Interfering Video Activist Television. We're a new affinity group. And, there's a lot of us around, as you can see. And tomorrow, we're going to be one of the things we're going

to be doing police surveillance. We're going to make sure police behave themselves. [APPLAUSE].

### **Second Anniversary Action: "TARGET CITY HALL"**

#### **Demonstration and Civil Disobedience March 28, 1989**

*ACT UP's second anniversary protest draws 3,000 to New York's City Hall, making "Target City Hall" the largest AIDS activist demonstration to date. ACT UP protests the inadequacy of New York's AIDS policy under Mayor Edward Koch. About 200 are arrested.*

MALE: An activist girl's day is never done.

[MUSIC IN BACKGROUND].

MALE: Another third world song. [MUSIC].

GROUP: [SIMULTANEOUS CHANTING] WE'LL NEVER BE SILENT AGAIN, ACT UP, WE'LL NEVER BE SILENT AGAIN. ACT UP, FIGHT BACK, FIGHT AIDS.

[POLICE ARRESTS ACTIVISTS SITTING IN STREET]

CHANTING: WE'LL NEVER BE SILENT AGAIN, ACT UP, WE'LL NEVER BE SILENT AGAIN, ACT UP.

### **STORYTELLING by Ron Goldberg**

#### **[10th ANNIVERSARY STORYTELLINGS] March 21, 1997**

RON GOLDBERG: A memory that occurs to me a lot is also this nine days of rain. Though it didn't rain we went to Albany, the state capital. It was the ninth day. Everyone was supposed to go to their state capital. And, it was one of those, you know, yelling at empty buildings kinds of days, but you wanted to get the people, you wanted to get the vote, so we all went up to Albany. And, we arrive in Albany, and to get to this park, where they were supposed to have the memorial Quilt out. But, it was like the Tulip Festival. It was called the Pinkster Fest [LAUGHTER]. So, out we come leather jackets, black jeans, silence=death, and all of a sudden we're in, like, the land of gingham. There were arts and crafts booths and funnel cake. And, we're just kind of, like, walking around, like "you know where the quilt is?" you know. And then we get to there was a street right before the Quilt, and there were all these beauty queens in open convertibles [LAUGHTER] waving. So, our queens, saw their queens [LAUGHTER, APPLAUSE]. I remember Michael Nesline -- Nurse Nesline, as we used to call him - and he was, like, "Darling" [LAUGHTER]. But - and then, we kind of did this strange crossover, and then there was this really unreal moment, because there we were, and there was the Quilt. And, we were dealing with this, while America was having this tulip festival. And it was like what I call, a Robert Altman moment, because it's just, like, could it be clearer? And that afternoon, Vito Russo was one of the speakers at our rally, and he gave what is still to my mind, the greatest speech I've ever heard in my life, where he talked about: it's like being in a war where only you can hear the bombs dropping, and everyone else is going about their lives - was one of the themes he said. And, it was this incredible, incredible speech, incredible moment. And, in the middle of it, there was actually a car of drunken teenagers who stopped and started yelling things, as if we needed a reminder. And then, after the speech, Frank Jump got up, he had recorded some sort of - I don't know if it's a disco rap, whatever - some sort of ACT UP song -who knows? He brought his boom box, and this song and this beat came on, and ACT UP our group -- just, all of a sudden, just got up and started dancing. And, I think some of the older activists were sort of, like, "dance?? This is a political rally." [LAUGHTER] But, it was so much what the group was. It was that, you know the saying: "if I can't dance you can keep your revolution," however I butchered the saying, you know, from Emma Goldman. It was just such a joy, along with the death, along with all the horrible things... that we would dance together, we would yell and scream together, we would march together, and we would take care of one another. And, that for me that day, just had an awful lot of that, all together at one time. And, I think of that as, as one of my favorite ACT UP day moments.

### **"NINE DAYS OF RAGE [RAIN] " ALBANY ACTION May 9, 1988**

*May 1-9, 1988: ACT UP Chapters around the country mount nine days of protests focusing on specific, unattended aspects of the epidemic such as IV drug use, homophobia, people of color, women, testing programs, prison programs and children with AIDS. More than 50 cities participate.*

VOICE THROUGH A MEGAPHONE: We also need some more Quilt volunteers and some people who know the ACT UP snake.

MALE: ACT UP snake?

CROWD NOISES

[BREAK]

GROUP CHANTING: NO MORE BUSINESS AS USUAL, NO MORE BUSINESS AS USUAL. THEY SAY CUT BACK, WE SAY FIGHT BACK, THEY SAY CUT BACK, WE SAY FIGHT BACK.

[BREAK]

GROUP: ACT UP, ACT DOWN, FIGHT AIDS.

### **VITO RUSSO Speech (excerpt) Albany, New York May 9, 1988**

VITO RUSSO: You know, living with AIDS in this country is like living in the twilight zone. Living with AIDS is like living through a war which is happening only for those people who happen to be in the trenches. Every time a shell explodes, you look around and you discover that you've lost more of your friends, but nobody else notices. It isn't happening to them. They're walking the streets as though we weren't living through some sort of nightmare. And only you can hear the screams of the people who are dying and their cries for help. No one else seems to be noticing. And it's worse than a war, because during a war, people are united in a shared experience. This war has not united us, it's divided us. It's separated those of us with AIDS and those of us who fight for people with AIDS, from the rest of the population.

Two and a half years ago, I picked up Life Magazine, and I read an editorial which said, "it's time to pay attention, because this disease is now beginning to strike the rest of us." It was as if I wasn't the one holding the magazine in my hand. And since then, nothing has changed to alter the perception that AIDS is not happening to the "real" people in this country. It's not happening to us in the United States. It's happening to them - to the disposable populations of fags and junkies who deserve what they get.

[BREAK]

Don't believe the lie that the gay community has done its job and done it well and educated its people. The gay community and IV drug users are not all politicized people living in New York and San Francisco. Members of minority populations, including so called sophisticated gay men, are abysmally ignorant about AIDS. [APPLAUSE]. If it is true that gay men and IV drug users are the populations at risk for this disease, then we have a right to demand that education and prevention be targeted specifically to these people. And it is not happening. [APPLAUSE]. We are being allowed to die, while low risk populations are being panicked - not educated, panicked - into believing that we deserve to die. Why are we here together today? We're here because it is happening to us, and we do give a shit. [SCREAM FROM STREET] And if there were more of us and less of them [APPLAUSE] AIDS wouldn't be what it is at this moment in history. It's more than just a disease, which ignorant people have turned into an excuse to exercise the bigotry they have always felt. It is more than a horror story, exploited by the tabloids. AIDS is really a test of us, as a people. When future generations ask what we did in this crisis, we're going to have to tell them that we were out here today. And we have to leave the legacy to those generations of people who will come after us. Someday, the AIDS crisis will be over. Remember that. [APPLAUSE] And when that day comes when that day has come and gone, there'll be people alive on this earth - gay people and straight people, men and women, black and white --who will hear the story that once there was a terrible disease in this country and all over the world, and that a brave group of people stood up and fought and, in some cases, gave their lives, so that other people might live and be free. So, I'm proud to be with my friends today and the people I love, because I think you're all heroes, and I'm glad to be part of this fight. But, to borrow a phrase from Michael Callen's song: all we have is love right now, what we don't have is time. In a lot of ways, AIDS activists are like those doctors out there they're so busy putting out fires and taking care of people on respirators, that they don't have the time to take care of all the sick people. We're so busy putting out fires right now, that we don't have the time to talk to each other and strategize and plan for the next wave, and the next day, and next month and the next week and the next year.

And, we're going to have to find the time to do that in the next few months. And, we have to commit ourselves to doing that. And then, after we kick the shit out of this disease, we're all going to be alive to kick the shit out of this system, so that this never happens again. [APPLAUSE].

[ read complete Vito Russo speech at: [www.actupny.org/documents/whfight.html](http://www.actupny.org/documents/whfight.html) ]

## **SEIZE CONTROL OF THE FDA (Food and Drug Administration) Action October 11, 1988**

*ACT UP closes down the FDA outside of Washington, DC. More than 1,000 activists stage a series of demonstrations which result in almost 180 arrests. The event receives international press coverage. A historical event, shutting down the FDA represents to a vast audience the lethargy of this dysfunctional bureaucracy, which is in charge of testing and approving possible AIDS treatments.*

GROUP CHANTING: FORTY-TWO THOUSAND DEAD OF AIDS, WHERE WAS THE FDA.  
SEIZE CONTROL. SEIZE CONTROL. RELEASE THE DRUGS NOW, RELEASE THE DRUGS NOW.

POLICE: Move back.

GROUP CHANTING: WE DIE, THEY DO NOTHING. WE DIE, THEY DO NOTHING.

(SIMULTANEOUS YELLING).

GROUP: NO VIOLENCE, NO VIOLENCE, NO VIOLENCE, NO VIOLENCE.

[BREAK].

VITO RUSSO [PRESS CONFERENCE]: My name is Vito Russo. I'm a writer from New York City and I have AIDS and I'm here today because I don't want to die. I know that there are available 80 drugs that haven't been tested yet by the FDA. I know that it takes nine months to test a drug in Europe, in Belgium, in France, in Germany, in England, for both safety and efficacy. I want to know why it takes five to 10 years in this country, to test drugs that you can test in Europe in half the time, a quarter of the time, in a third of the time. I know that there are drugs out there that can save my life, and I want to know why they're not being tested more quickly. We are not asking the FDA to release dangerous drugs, without safety or efficacy. We are simply asking the FDA to do it quicker. It is possible to test these drugs in record time. I'm here today because I don't want a quilt with my name on it in front of the White House next year.

## **STOP THE CHURCH ACTION, December 10, 1989**

*ACT UP and WHAM! (Women's Health Action and Mobilization) co-sponsor the first "Stop the Church" demonstration. 4,500 protesters gather outside St. Patrick's Cathedral to decry the Church's opposition to safer sex education, violent homophobia, and attempts to block access to safe and legal abortions. 111 people are arrested.*

RAY NAVARRO: This is Ray Navarro, speaking to Suzanne from DIVA TV. We were just going over the list of who are the actual participants in this demonstration, and what are they going to be doing? Where were we at, Suzanne?

SUZANNE: We were at "Speaking in Tongues", Ray.

RN: And where are they going to be?

SUZANNE: Now, they're doing the communion inside. "Seeing Red". I don't even know who's in "Seeing Red".

RN: We're with "Seeing Red". We've spoken with them already. That's a secret action.

SUZANNE: Are you going to... okay.

RN: No, you're with "Wave Three", that's right.

SUZANNE: And the "Candelabras".

RN: The "Candelabras" are going to be trying to go inside, aren't they?

[BREAK]

[ORGAN MUSIC]

[NOISES OF CROWDS].

GROUP: [SIMULTANEOUS CONVERSATION].

POLICE: You, if you're part of the press, you can be over here, okay?

POLICE: You're not even working press.

FEMALE [DIVA TV]: Of course, I'm working press - I'm working.

POLICE: You don't have a working press card.

FEMALE [DIVA TV]: Who are you?

POLICE: Take them to the other side of the street. I think it's absolutely ridiculous.

POLICE: Officer.

POLICE: Who are you with? What's "D.I.V.A.?"

**PRE-ACTION ACT UP MEETING "STORM THE NIH" (National Institutes of Health)  
including RAP May 20, 1990**

MALE: What about this one? One fucking drug - AZT - \$1 billion dollars. Have you seen these around? [READING FROM "ENJOY AZT" POSTER:] The U.S. Government has spent \$1 billion dollars over the past 10 years, to research new AIDS drugs. The result? One drug - AZT. It makes half - oh, it gets worse - it makes half the people who try it sick, and the other half - it stops working after a year. It may stop working after a year. Is AZT the last, best hope for people with AIDS? Or, is it a short-term cut to the killing Burroughs-Wellcome is making in the AIDS marketplace? Scores of drug languish in government pipelines, while fortunes are made on this monopoly. Is this healthcare or wealth care? Storm the NIH! [CHEERS] [APPLAUSE]. You've seen this, you've seen this, right? You've seen this. Has it made you angry?

[BREAK]

MALE: And, how many people will be risking arrest tomorrow doing civil disobedience.

[APPLAUSE].

MALE: This is ACT UP New York's PISD caucus's first action.

MALE: We're the "Chain Gang".

MALE: We're the "Awning Leapers".

MALE: We're called "The Non-Toxics".

FEMALE: We're the "InVisible Women". We're from ACT UP New York. [APPLAUSE].

MALE: Our affinity group is called the "Hirsch's Kisses".

MALE: Hi, we're "Wave Three" of ACT UP New York, and our message for them is "Treatment or Riot".

MALE: We are "Dos Locos Radicales and WAR".

FEMALE: And, I'm from the "Costa" affinity group in New York.

FEMALE: And, I'm from ACT UP DC. [APPLAUSE]

MALE: We're the "Isolations" from ACT UP Chicago.

MALE: I'm representing "AIDA Action into Direct Action".

MALE: We're with the "Power Tools". We're the group that shut down the New York Stock Exchange.

[BREAK]

MALE: Okay, listen, affinity groups it's very important to remember this before you do your action, you should appoint someone, name someone, to find somebody from DIVA TV who are going to be wearing those armbands to document what you are doing. It's good for legal purposes, and it's good for us to document what's going on.

[BREAK]

**RAP PERFORMANCE BY TONY MALLIARIS:**

RAP: Two kinds of positive. One is so good. The other kind of gets me through the first like I knew it could. Talking about HIV : I own it and A-C-T-U-P: you've shown it works, in any way or form. We target, we seize, tomorrow we storm. Hey, am I getting through to you? Because all of this it ain't nothin' new. This is the story of a coalition, my interpretation, my rendition of ACT UP, the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, the NIH and its final hour. [APPLAUSE]. Can you say it with me? Storm the NIH. Let's go. Storm the NIH. This is war.

GROUP: Storm the NIH.

RAP: For the sick.

GROUP: Storm the NIH.

RAP: For the poor.

GROUP: Storm the NIH.

RAP: ACT UP.

GROUP: Storm the NIH.

RAP: Fight back.

GROUP: Storm the NIH.

RAP: Fight AIDS.

GROUP: Storm the NIH.

RAP: Check it out -- One billion dollars, one AIDS

drug, 10 years later, these greedy thugs say, we're doing the best we can. Bullshit. 100,000 deaths say it best - you're full of it. A-C-T-G it's what these fools claim to oversee. It stands for AIDS Clinical Trial



Group, to test AIDS drugs, but here's the scoop, out of 101 clinical trials in place, 50 percent shove AZT in your face. Excuse me, that drug's approved. We need drugs for OI's, get busy, move! In the U.S. Alone, less than 5 percent of all the people with AIDS have ever spent a day in a clinical trial in this nation, the rest are denied cuz of regulation. But, why should the principal investigators care? They keep the research funds, it ain't fair, no matter if a single soul is enrolled or not, the money's still theirs to keep, and it's a lot. I don't know what Fauci thinks, but this ain't Denmark, and something stinks. After three and a half years of existence, there ain't much to justify subsistence. Temperatures rising, gettin' warm, the party's over, we're here to Storm the NIH, let's go. Storm the NIH. This is war.

GROUP: Storm the NIH.

RAP: For the sick.

GROUP: Storm the NIH.

RAP: For the poor.

GROUP: Storm the NIH.

RAP: ACT UP.

GROUP: Storm the NIH.

RAP: Fight back.

GROUP: Storm the NIH.

RAP: Fight AIDS.

GROUP: Storm the NIH.

RAP: O.I.'s Opportunistic Infections, ignored by committees making selections for promising drugs: they'd rather import nucleoside analogs, the AZT sort. That's why 85 percent of the subjects are sent to trials bent on testing drugs like DDI, DDC and AZT. Yah, hey! But, but about HIV neuropathy, fungal infection, CMV, test agents for MAI, treat Toxo now before more die. Research treatments for lymphoma, investigate Karposi's Sarcoma. Listen to the issues you can't dismiss. I shouldn't even have to be tellin' you this. While you're at it, why don't you open the trials, cuz the line of people you refuse goes on for miles. We've got women with AIDS, believe it, please. You ever heard of Public Inflammatory Disease. [APPLAUSE, CHEERS]. We've got babies and children dying for drugs they helped us find - you ain't tryin'. We've got people of color, with no where to go. Do your trials address their needs? No. We've got IV drug users in need of the same as everyone else in this creed. [SPANISH] *Tenemos gente que no comprenden idioma que hablo: apoyenlos – entienden?!* [APPLAUSE, CHEERS]. Is what I'm saying is so out of norm? I don't think so. And that's why we've come to Storm the NIH.

GROUP: STORM THE NIH. STORM THE NIH. STORM THE NIH.

RAP: Fight back.

GROUP: STORM THE NIH.

RAP: Fight AIDS.

RAP: Ladies and Gentlemen... October '88, in a serious way, we seized control of the FDA. It took too long approv'in' tested drugs, respondin' with lame excuses and shrugs. Further south in Atlanta Georgia, we did a C.D. thing at the CDC, because the Centers for Disease Control down there were defining AIDS like they didn't care. Now, we find another kind, an Institute of Health that don't seem to mind the negligence within the system they run, but those Ivory Tower days are done. You know what's makin' the people sick besides AIDS? Bureaucracy. You know what pisses me off the most? It's not HIV. It's hypocrisy. It seems so ironic to realize that all of these places are under the guise of the Department of Health and Human Services, HHS, who would have guessed? So, if the quality fades a commissioner Jades or somebody grades a person with AIDS, they better change their ways, or we're on a bus – you ever been embarrassed by a thousand of us? We're ACT UP, we demand healthcare for all, summer to spring, winter to fall. We don't act without cause, but before too long, if ACT UP's there, then something's wrong. Yeah, right? This is a trial by jury of straights and queers. We're sayin': save lives, and not careers. We're fired up for tomorrow morn. Remember, if you don't like something, change it!

Storm the NIH.

GROUP: STORM THE NIH, STORM THE NIH. ACT UP.

## **STORM THE NIH (National Institutes of Health)**

### **Demonstration and Civil Disobedience May 21, 1990**

*ACT UP/NY organizes a national action to "Storm the NIH (National Institutes of Health)." One thousand protesters demand more AIDS treatments, especially for the opportunistic infections that kill PWAs, an end to the*

severe underrepresentation of women and people of color in clinical trials, and the formation of a Womens Health Committee in the AIDS Clinical Trial System at the NIH.

CHANTS: STORM THE N.I.H. ACT UP! STORM THE N.I.H. ACT UP!

CHANTS: N.I.H. YOUR NAME'S A LIE, YOU CAN'T FIGHT FOR WOMEN DIE. [UNSURE TRANSCRIPTION]

CHANTS: STORM THE NIH. STORM THE NIH

CHANTS: WHERE ARE THE DRUGS? WHERE ARE THE DRUGS?

CHANTS: N.I.H. IS A DISASTER, WOMEN DIE SIX TIMES FASTER.

CROWD [REACTING TO POLICE]: NO VIOLENCE. NO VIOLENCE.

### **ACT UP MEETING: Post STORM THE NIH Action (including first vote to support Needle Exchange)**

MALE: The cops were really awful, I thought. And, my cop, in particular -when I found out what I was charged with, he'd completely lied about my charges. And he said - I don't know if people here saw it. He said, that I had broken through a line of cops and assaulted him.

What I had done was gone limp. And, it was just completely a lie. It's all on tape. Catherine has tape.

FEMALE: When one of our people was getting arrested - Bill Monahan - they, when they brought us out to the bus. They took all our stuff out of our pockets and put it in plastic bags with our arrest number on it.

And the cops out of nowhere, out of their own personal belongings, pulled out one of those M-80 firecrackers and put it in Bill's possessions bag. And they said, charge him with firearms possession. They hated us a lot. Anyway, one of the DC-lawyer-types saw it, and they got it on video [CHEERS AND APPLAUSE] and George [Plagianos] of DIVA TV was there, and that made all the difference in the world, too. And thank him. And Terry, who was our legal observer -she was great, too. That was it. It was great.

MALE: Anyways, I'd just like to propose that we pay all funds if people hand them to us, and they need to be paid.

ACT UP FACILITATOR: Pay all fines or as-needed basis?

MALE: As needed.

ACT UP FACILITATOR: So, did everybody understand the proposal right now that ACT UP pick up the fines for all people who need it. There were 80 arrests and it's approximately \$50 dollars so, it's a maximum of \$4 thousand dollars.

So, do we need a discussion on this?

GROUP: No.

ACT UP FACILITATOR: Okay does anybody want to speak against this, just to make sure that everybody gets to speak? Okay, then we'll just do it unanimously. All those in favor, just raise your hands. All those opposed? Abstentions? Okay, we've got

[BREAK]

BOB RAFSKY: The NIH action was the second story that night on the CBS Evening News with Dan Rather. It was the second story on the ABC World News Tonight with Peter Jennings, and on the NBC Nightly News, they used the occasion to do an entire feature on ACT UP it was reasonably well-informed by Robert Bezel, the science editor. And, I personally left the NIH action with a lot of questions in my mind about dealing with mace, about repetitiveness of our tactics the same things that you're hearing on the floor tonight. But, for what it's worth, the country as a whole saw something very powerful on TV that night on all three networks, and I thought people should know. [APPLAUSE]

[BREAK]

ROBERT FARBER: We have a lot of business to get to tonight future actions, future business. We've covered this. I would like to propose that we end discussion on the NIH and that we move onto the zap San Francisco [APPLAUSE].

ACT UP FACILITATOR: All those who would like to move on the discussion, and all people who want to continue with NIH, we'll move forward after that. So, all those who want to end discussion and move on right now? Okay all those who want to continue discussion? Does anybody want to speak against that? Does everybody understand what that would involve? Yes. Okay so, all those in favor of the needle exchange support by the organization? All those opposed? All those abstaining? Okay? [APPLAUSE].

ROD SORGE: The eastern seaboard is kind of in and out about needle exchange. We did our action here. We did one in New Jersey [INAUDIBLE]. National AIDS Brigade did Connecticut and



Massachusetts, and a couple of weeks, National AIDS Brigade did Rhode Island. Next week, we're doing Delaware which, besides for Maine and New Hampshire eastern seaboard, in which needles are criminalized. So, Zoe is going to tell you about our action in Delaware on Thursday.

ZOE LEONARD: Welcome to this meeting. As a demonstrator or people who willing to risk arrest doing this. If we're going to do this, we might as well make as much of a stink about this as possible.

[BREAK]

MALE [OFF CAMERA]: Most of the test is carried out by immigration doctors, carried out by general private physicians, who are nominated by the INS [INAUDIBLE], sometimes they do. But, a lot of the time, they don't bother because of the And, also because [INAUDIBLE].

**SAN FRANCISCO AIDS CONFERENCE, June 16-23, 1990** *Members of ACT UP/NY join AIDS activists from around the world at the Sixth International Conference on AIDS in San Francisco (also Shouting-down Health and Human Services Secretary Louis Sullivan). Demonstrations throughout the conference highlight issues of importance to the AIDS community. ACT UP/NY's Treatment and Data Committee issues its 1990 Treatment Agenda which outlines the direction the AIDS research community should be taking in the coming year which becomes one of the most talked about documents at the conference.*

PETER STALEY: All right. Now, hold up. [APPLAUSE][CHEERS]. In an effort to bridge the gap, there now seems to exist between AIDS activists and you, members of the medical and scientific communities.

I would like you to join us, in an act of activism. Trust me, you'll enjoy this. Standing up for a political battle you believe in and vocalizing your commitment is very empowering. First, I would like to be joined in front of the stage by my fellow AIDS activists. Will you all come up? [APPLAUSE].

At this moment, there are others just like us, who are trying to get into this conference that are being barred by the San Francisco Police 375 And, there are still others like us, who are trying to San Francisco airport, but are being detained instead because they attempts to bar HIV [INAUDIBLE]. But he won't. He is at this very moment in North Carolina attending a fund raiser for that pig in the Senate Jesse Helms [BOOS]. Join us in this chant, '300 Thousand Dead From AIDS, Where Is George?'

GROUP CHANTING: 300 THOUSAND DEAD FROM AIDS, WHERE IS GEORGE?

CHANGE THE LAWS, CHANGE THE LAWS

[STREET DEMONSTRATION]

GROUP CHANTING: JUSTICE, EQUALITY, IT'S ALL FUCKING LIES, OUR HOMOPHOBIC GOVERNMENT IS LETTING WOMEN DIE. HEALTHCARE IS A RIGHT, NOT JUST FOR THE STRAIGHT AND WHITE. WOMEN DIE FASTER. THE WHOLE WORLD IS WATCHING.

**ACT UP MEETING: Post San Francisco AIDS Conference** | *Aldyn McKean and Bob Rafsky*  
Includes ZAP of Shouting-Down 1990 Health and Human Services Secretary Louis Sullivan.

ALDYN MCKEAN: The most number of arrests happened that day, and it was incredibly successful, in contrast to the conference treatment of women's issues, which was virtually non-existent.

There were 147 people who were arrested, and it was done very well, and having a single day and a single demonstration with one single focus on women's issues and, we ended up occupying an intersection and the police, again, went a little crazy, and they decided it was easier to break people's arms by twisting them behind their backs than it was to carry or drag people.

And, Sunday, of course, was the speech by Louis Sullivan, and I'm sure that you pretty much all know what happened.

[BREAK]

T.V. NEWS: The noise was deafening, as AIDS activists vented their anger of the Bush Administration's AIDS policies. After about 10 minutes of demonstrations, Sullivan finally took the podium, but he could not be heard over all the protestors. Despite the chaos, the secretary, unflinchingly continued his speech. Protestors were held back. Their paper missiles were not.

BOB RAFSKY: And the funerals went on. And the shadow of this epidemic came over more of us, including, at the end of this year, one of the best of us -Vito Russo. And Vito's absence from San Francisco, speaks as eloquently as Peter's presence as to what's actually happening to us.

This epidemic is allowed to go on, unrelenting. There was good work done in San Francisco, but I don't

sense any more than Montreal than any of them will have any real impact on that.

For all the work that we've done, we haven't yet done the work, and for all the secrets we've unlocked, we haven't yet found the secret of stopping this epidemic. And nothing that happened in San Francisco, I'm sad to say, it seems to me will effect that. We have a lot of work to do.

### **DAY OF DESPERATION (with CBS News Zap) January 23, 1991**

*ACT UP declares a "Day of Desperation" in New York City. This action, designed to target every aspect of City life, demands that everyone realize that every day is a day of desperation for those in the AIDS community. Day of Desperation begins when activists invaded PBS and CBS Evening News broadcasts on the night of the 22nd. On the 23rd a morning demo begins on Wall St. and more than 2000 protesters marched with coffins that were delivered to City, State & Federal officials responsible for perpetuating the AIDS epidemic. At 5:00 pm, rush hour, Grand Central Station was the setting for a spectacular and massive act of civil disobedience as ACT UP took over the station. A banner announcing "One AIDS Death Every Eight Minutes" was hung over the arrivals board. 263 people are later arrested as the group attempted to march to the United Nations.*



DAN RATHER: This is the CBS Evening News. Dan Rather reporting.

ACTIVIST: AIDS is news. Fight AIDS not Arabs

DAN RATHER: We're going to take a break for a commercial. Thank you very much.

[DEMONSTRATION IN GRAND CENTRAL STATION]

[BREAK]

TIM BAILEY [INTERVIEWED FOR TV NEWS]: For 10 years, we've been trying everything possible to work in the system, and it's obvious that this government in five months was able to pull together billions and billions of dollars when they have been telling us there's no money.

### **TARGET BUSH Action (White House) September 30, 1991**

*ACT UP targets President Bush at the White House, declaring that, with over 120,000 Americans dead from AIDS, the President is getting away with murder. In a loud and angry march to the White House, activists demanded that the President stop his deliberate policy of neglect. Eighty-four people were arrested in acts of civil disobedience that included chaining themselves to the gates of the White House and to each other. Bush spent the day in Disney World.*

CHANTS: WHERE IS GEORGE?!

### **ASHES ACTION October 11, 1992 and ACT UP MEETING post Ashes Action**

*ACT UP/NY holds its first political funeral -- the ASHES Action -- in Washington, DC, on the weekend of the final exhibition of the AIDS Quilt. In a procession starting at the Capitol, 11 people from both coasts carried ashes of friends, family and lovers. Met at the White House lawn by police in riot gear, on motorcycles, and on horses, the procession -- by then some 8,000 strong -- broke through police lines and scattered the ashes on the White House lawn.*

MALE: Phone number, address, date of birth and name right?

MALE: Yup.

FEMALE: How many people here are going to be marshalling?

MALE: And so, he is going to let people who are not risking arrest, inside the fence, while the people who have earned people who risk arrest, will continue outside the fence. And then, that will go around, right to the White House fence.

[BREAK]

[DEMONSTRATION NOISE]

GROUP: FIGHT BACK, FIGHT AIDS, ACT UP. THE WHOLE WORLD IS WATCHING. SHAME SHAME.

[BREAK]

DAVID ROBINSON: George Bush would only be too happy for us simply to make beautiful panels and I'm not belying the quilt it's very useful, it's very important, but it's very beautiful and it does make a lot of people feel better. On some level, I heard people out there, as they walked among the panels sort of sighing, this is beautiful. It's so good that this is happening, and we made such a wonderful panel. And I would wonder, is this making you feel like this is okay in some way? Because it's not. What we are doing is showing everyone who sees us at the White House, who sees any of this in the paper or on TV who passes it on the street-- we're showing them the actual results of what that White House and this administration has done. They have turned people we love into ashes and bone chips and corpses. That should not be hidden. And, from this point on - and I hope you all agree with me - we are not going to hide this anymore, because hiding it is what they want.

[BREAK]

GROUP CHANTING: ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY [THOUSAND] DEAD, WHERE WAS GEORGE?!

GROUP CHANTING: HISTORY WILL RECALL REAGAN AND BUSH DID NOTHING AT ALL.

GROUP CHANTING: GEORGE BUSH, YOU CAN'T HIDE. WE CHARGE YOU WITH GENOCIDE.

GROUP CHANTING: BRINGING THE DEAD TO YOUR DOOR. WE WON'T TAKE IT ANYMORE.

BOB RAFSKY: This is angry funeral, not a sad one. The quilt makes our dying look beautiful, but it's not beautiful, it's ugly, and we have to fight for our lives.

GROUP CHANTING: ACT UP, FIGHT BACK, FIGHT AIDS.

[ASHES ACTION]

GROUP CHANTING: THE WHOLE WORLD IS WATCHING.

[ACT UP MEETING AFTER ASHES ACTION]

BOB RAFSKY: This action was coordinated by Shane, who was ACT UP and never organized an action before. In the van on the way down he's going to kill me for repeating this he confessed that he'd been having nightmares all week about this action, and that one of them was that you would all depart Washington afterwards, and leave him behind. [LAUGHTER]. We were actually very touched by that. At any rate, the next day, when I saw him pressed against the White House fence by all our bodies kneeling and weeping, as over him. I felt, felt for certain, that he would never have that nightmare again. But, if this action was cathartic for Shane and others, as it was, it was cathartic, in a different way for people like David Robinson, who was a founding member of ACT UP and, as you heard, inspired this action, name, and will help give it some voice. Because in a certain sense, it was our funeral, too in that we were not so much needing it, as passing through it, and handing leadership, or what you will, to a new generation of AIDS activists who, with this action, wholly and completely emerge, so that the ashes which we mourn are also the ashes from which we rise. And, my most fervent hope for this new generation of activists, is that before you have to take on a burden of inspiring yet another generation of activists, your work will be done. [APPLAUSE].

[BREAK]

MALE: One of the things as we were getting out there and getting closer, I remember, I was talking it's hard for me to explain some of these things to people who aren't activists. Like, I was telling people we are going to do this and I try to explain... Well, that's sacrilegious. And, I called my Grandmother, who's very black and very southern, to explain this to Grandma. And, I had preconceived what she'd end up saying. And there was a pause and she goes, "well, that's wonderful". And, I said... And she said, "well, you know", she called me baby. She goes, "well, baby, what we used to do when they used to lynch from the lynching time, they would go out and pick the ropes after they lynched people, and they would burn the ropes and they'd put in ashes. And they would say, see, we burned your tool and you can use it against no more." And so, as we were pinned against the fence, and these horses literally, these horses were going to try... I was frightened. I thought I... and I just saw Grandma and I just saw here, people were throwing these ashes over and people were like it was just speechless. It was like, we were returning to ... it was like, George Bush, you have no power. This had never been done before. I mean, I called people like This was a great idea, you know? All the oppressed groups can bring their ashes to the White House. I mean, let's use the White House as a dumping ground for ashes. [APPLAUSE].

[BREAK]

MALE: I just was wondering, how involved were the other ACT UP's in other places and what was their participation?

SHANE BUTLER: The messages on my machine that I answered were from all over the country many of them from ACT UP. So, it got the word through the ACT UP network. I know of ACT UP, Connecticut; ACT

UP one of ACT UP New Jersey.

GROUP: [SIMULTANEOUS CONVERSATION] Boston, Houston, London, Long Island, New York....

RICHARD DEAGLE: The spiritual parent of yesterday's event... that's David Wojnarowicz. The second time I met David was at the FDA action. He had on his back on the back of his jacket "*when I die, throw my body on the steps of the FDA*". And I think yesterday would have been very special for David.

One of the things I always think about in Washington is graffiti I saw years ago on the Duke Ellington Bridge that said, PIGS WILL FALL. And somebody had graffiti-ed under it, NEW PIGS WILL RISE. We only have three weeks before the election, but it ain't over yet. We've got to do this again, I'm sure.

### **Mark Lowe Fisher POLITICAL FUNERAL November 2, 1992**

*Following a political funeral at Judson Memorial Church in Manhattan, more than 300 AIDS Activists carry the open coffin of 38 year old ACT UP member Mark Lowe Fischer--a member of Marys, an affinity group who had been organizing political funerals for people with AIDS -- from Washington Square to the Republican Headquarters on West 43rd Street. On the eve of the Presidential election, mourners indicted George Bush with Fisher's murder.*

JOY EPISALA READING FROM MARK LOWE FISHER'S MANIFESTO: My friends decided they don't want to speak at memorial services. We understand that friends and families need to mourn, but we also understand that we're dying because of a government and a healthcare system that couldn't care less. I want to show the reality of my death, to display my body in public. I want the public to bear witness. We are not just spiraling statistics. We are people who have lives, who have purpose, who have lovers, friends and families, and we are dying of a disease maintained by a degree of criminal neglect so enormous that it amounts to genocide. I want my own funeral to be fierce and defiant to make a public statement that my death remains in a form of political assassination. We are taking this action out of love and rage.

[ see *Political Funerals* at [www.actupny.org/diva/polfunsyn.html](http://www.actupny.org/diva/polfunsyn.html) ]

### **Tim Bailey POLITICAL FUNERAL July 1, 1993**

*The Marys affinity group carries out the second political funeral for an activist who has died of AIDS. Two hundred demonstrators travel to Washington, DC, to fulfill 35-year-old ACT UP and Marys affinity group member Tim Bailey's final wishes for a political funeral in front of the White House. After an emotional three-hour standoff, plans are thwarted when police attempt to wrestle the casket containing Bailey's embalmed body away from activists in front of the Capitol Building.*

ACTIVISTS: *This is a funeral. You are interfering with a funeral. You are interfering with a funeral by someone killed by AIDS. We want to see someone in charge.*

POLICE: *Do not pull it [THE COFFIN] out. Someone is coming to talk with you now. So place it back.*

DAVID ROBINSON: *What the hell are you afraid of? That ordinary citizens will see what our Government is doing? Is that what you're afraid of? That people are going to see exactly what our Government is doing? Yeah, we have a dead body here, we have a corpse. Why the hell do we have to hide a corpse?*

ACTIVISTS [SIMULTANEOUSLY]: *Who is in charge? We want to know who is in charge.*

### **Jon Greenberg POLITICAL FUNERAL July 16, 1993**

*In the third political funeral for a member of ACT UP New York affinity group The Marys, the coffin of Jon Greenberg, 37, co founder of ACT UP's Alternative and Holistic Treatment Committee and director of TAP (Treatment Alternatives Project) was carried through the streets of the East village to Tompkins Square Park in New York City, where personal eulogies were heard by more than 200 activists, friends and family members. "I don't want an angry political funeral," wrote Greenberg. "I just want you to burn me in the street and eat my flesh."*

REPORTER: There are those who agree with your message and priority, but disagree with your tactics. What do you say to that?

JON GREENBERG: I say to them that we will do anything that we can possibly do to get the response

that we need to the AIDS crisis. We obviously do need more money devoted to the AIDS crisis, but that's not why we're here today. We're asking for leadership. If the money were spent more wisely, the end of the AIDS crisis would be in sight. If there were leadership that was driving what that money was being spent on, then the end of the AIDS crisis would be in sight. And, if we had some people that actually listened to the recommendations made by the very commission that George Bush set up the National Commission on AIDS, which just this week put out its last report then the end of the AIDS crisis would be in sight, and would probably be here very soon. It's not the money. We're looking for the leadership and the direction that we need to end this crisis.

### **Aldyn McKean POLITICAL FUNERAL March 4, 1994**

ALDYN MCKEAN [INTERVIEWS ON TV NEWS]: There is a political component here. Somebody has to make decisions about how the resources of the country are spent. And, as far as I'm concerned, we need to triple and quadruple the spending on AIDS research, on treatments on vaccines. That is not happening, because the political will to make it happen isn't there. When Bill Clinton was a Presidential candidate, he made a number of promises to us that have not been kept. For example, and I think, most importantly, he promised that, yes, he would be a forceful, strong advocate for AIDS. He would, in fact, make AIDS his number one health priority. I don't see that. I don't see that happening. ACTIVISTS: We love you Aldyn.

### **STONEWALL 25 ANNIVERSARY: FIFTH AVE AIDS MARCH New York City June 26, 1994**

CHANTS: ACT UP, FIGHT BACK, FIGHT AIDS  
CHANTS: WHAT DO WE WANT, A CURE FOR AIDS. WHEN DO WE WANT IT? NOW.  
CHANTS: SUPPORT THE AIDS CURE PROJECT, A BILL IN CONGRESS TO FIND A CURE FOR AIDS. ACT UP, FIGHT BACK, FIGHT AIDS

### **Mayor Giuliani Protests CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE and ARRESTS**

CHANTS: SIXTY-FIVE HUNDRED DIED OF AIDS, RUDY FIGHT AIDS! THEY SAY CUT BACK, WE SAY FIGHT BACK. HEY HEY, HO HO, GIULIANI'S GOT TO GO! SHAME SHAME SHAME. PEOPLE WITH AIDS, UNDER ATTACK, WHAT DO WE DO? ACT UP, FIGHT BACK. NO VIOLENCE! ACT UP, FIGHT BACK, FIGHT AIDS.



### **TENTH ANNIVERSARY WALL STREET ACTION March 24, 1997**

CHANTS: SELL SELL SELL, DROP THE PRICES NOW.  
ACT UP, FIGHT BACK, FIGHT AIDS.

### **Steve Michael POLITICAL FUNERAL**

*Open Coffin in front of White House, June 4, 1998*

WAYNE TURNER: The man sitting the building behind us promised us six years ago, that if elected President, he would make AIDS a top priority in his administration. This President committed to this man lying here, right now, that he would launch and all-out research effort to find a cure for AIDS. The man who lives behind us promised this man lying here now, that he would appoint an AIDS czar to lead this country's efforts against this epidemic. The man who sits in the White House promised this man here, universal health care regardless of an ability to pay.

## **BOARD OF EDUCATION Demonstrations**

CHANTS: JUST SAY NO IS NOT ENOUGH, TEACH SAFE SEX.

## **SHOUTING-DOWN ZAP of Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson Barcelona International AIDS Conference, July 9, 2002**

CHANTS: SHAME SHAME SHAME SHAME

CHANTS: MONEY FOR AIDS, NOT FOR WAR, FUND THE GLOBAL FUND

## **Stop AIDS Apartheid, Coke Demonstration, New York City, October 17, 2002**

## **WORLD AIDS DAY Demonstration, White House, November 26, 2002**

CHANTS: WE NEED BILLIONS, TWO POINT FIVE, TO SAVE FORTY MILLION LIVES

## **VITO RUSSO Redux**

VITO RUSSO: When future generations ask what we did in this crisis, we're going to have to tell them that we were out here today. And we have to leave the legacy to those generations of people who will come after us. Someday, the AIDS crisis will be over. Remember that.

And when that day comes when that day has come and gone, there will be people alive on this earth gay people and straight people, men and women, black and white, who will hear the story that once there was a terrible disease in this country and all over the world, and that a brave group of people stood up and fought and, in some cases, gave their lives, so that other people might live.

### **| closing credits |**

Video by James Wentzy

Archival Documentary Video Footage by:

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[www.actupny.org](http://www.actupny.org)

November 2002

**Fight Back, Fight AIDS: 15 Years of ACTUP**

[www.actupny.org/video](http://www.actupny.org/video)