HIV & AIDS: A Brief History

INTRODUCTION TO THE 1992 DEMOCRATIC AND REPUBLICANS NATIONAL CONVENTION AIDS ADDRESSES
What is HIV? What is AIDS?

**HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus):** A virus which attacks the body’s immune system and destroys the CD4/T-cells, which are white blood cells which help to protect the body from other infections, diseases, and cancers; not curable, but can be managed.

**AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome):** The final stage of HIV infection, in which the immune system has become so debilitated that the body becomes susceptible to opportunistic infections; life expectancy without treatment is three years.
What is the history of HIV/AIDS?

1920s: HIV likely crossed from chimpanzees to humans through hunting and consumption of bushmeat.

1920s-1970s: HIV is unknown, and infections are generally unaccompanied by noticeable signs or symptoms.

1959: First detection of what would later be named HIV in a human (Democratic Republic of the Congo).

1981: Among previously healthy gay men in New York and California, a cluster of opportunistic infections emerges, including a rare lung disease and a rare cancer (Karposi’s sarcoma), indicating compromised immune systems.
What is the history of HIV/AIDS?

1982:

- Disease is initially called GRID (Gay-related immune deficiency)
- Cases begin to emerge among injection drug users, hemophiliacs, and Haitians
- Cases begin to emerge among infants who have had blood transfusions
- CDC officially names the disease AIDS in September

1983:

- Cases begin to emerge in adult females
- CDC identifies all possible routes of AIDS transmission
What is the history of HIV/AIDS?

1985
- Ryan White, a boy who became infected through a blood transfusion, is refused admission to his middle school.
- President Ronald Reagan speaks of AIDS for the first time.

1986: The virus that causes AIDS, which had been identified a few years earlier, is named HIV.

1992: AIDS become the leading killer of American men ages 25 to 44.

1993: *Philadelphia*, the first film dealing with AIDS, is released.

1994: Pedro Zamora brings national attention to AIDS by being part of the first cast of MTV’s *The Real World*.
What were perceptions of AIDS in 1992?

Fear and lack of understanding of HIV/AIDS often resulted in:

- assumptions that infected people had done something to deserve it.
- beliefs that infected people must be gay, drug users, etc.
- resistance to provide full medical care (in some cases).
- fears that having close contact with an infected person would result in infection.
- negative stigma that made people fear being tested, which led to further infections.
Rhetorical Situation – DNC Address

**Speaker:** Elizabeth Glaser; AIDS patient who contracted AIDS through a blood transfusion in 1981 and passed it to her children (one through breastmilk, one *in utero*); mother of a child who died from AIDS; cofounder of the Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation.

**Occasion:** 1992 Democratic National Convention (July 13-16, New York City); a social climate with stereotypes like the ones previously mentioned.

**Audience:** *Immediate* – Democratic delegates; politically motivated people; people who aim to elect Bill Clinton President; *Larger* – Americans who have limited knowledge and understanding of HIV/AIDS, many of whom believe in stereotypes and misinformation.
Rhetorical Situation – RNC Address ("A Whisper of AIDS")

**Speaker**: Mary Fisher; HIV patient who contracted the disease from her husband in marriage

**Occasion**: 1992 Republican National Convention (August 17-August 20, Houston); a social climate with stereotypes like the ones previously mentioned

**Audience**: *Immediate* – Republican delegates; politically motivated people; people who aim to keep George W. Bush President; *Larger* – Americans who have limited knowledge and understanding of HIV/AIDS, many of whom believe in stereotypes and misinformation