In his prologue to *And the Band Played On*, Randy Shilts (1988) wrote that the death of actor Rock Hudson in 1985 finally brought AIDS into mainstream American culture. "Rock Hudson riveted America’s attention upon this deadly new threat for the first time," Shilts wrote (1998, p. xxi), "and his diagnosis became a demarcation that would separate the history of America before AIDS from the history that came after (p. xxi)."

Yet, of course, that attention was years in arrears. "By the time America paid attention to the disease, it was too late to do anything about it," Shilts wrote. "The tide of death that would later sweep America could, perhaps, be slowed, but it could not be stopped."

*Five years before*, gay men were beginning to become ill and die from this mysterious disease, a disease that met with little action from government, medical, and scientific authorities as well as the news media. Shilts’ book is a riveting and tragic history of this failed public policy on AIDS.

For many in critical studies, Shilts’ book itself was a landmark. A *San Francisco Chronicle* reporter, Shilts had been assigned to cover AIDS full time in the early 1980s. His reporting was years ahead of other media outlets. Then, in 1987, Shilts produced his monumental text, which can still stand as an exemplar of critical research and media analysis. I went back to it not long ago and was struck once again by the power of its story and critique. I wonder how many of our students are familiar with this classic and its message.

In “Critical Forum” we hope to present invited essays on media subjects and themes sometimes overlooked in current research. It’s been 25 years since an acquired immune deficiency began to be diagnosed and its horrific implications understood by some in the medical community. It’s been 20 years since the death of Rock Hudson. We asked Kristen Alley Swain, who has studied news coverage of AIDS, to use these occasions to look back on the history of our scholarship. Have we lived up to the work of Randy Shilts?

Shilts ended his prologue with hopeful words. He wrote:

> [T]he story of politics, people, and the AIDS epidemic is, ultimately, a tale of courage as well as cowardice, compassion as well as bigotry, inspiration as well as
venality, and redemption as well as despair. It is a tale that bears telling, so that it will never happen again, to any people, anywhere (p. xxiii).

Shilts, who died of AIDS in 1994, would be saddened to see: It is still happening. The tale still needs to be told.

Reference

By this point, a number of AIDS-specific organisations had been set up including the San Francisco AIDS Foundation (SFAF) in the USA and the Terrence Higgins Trust in the UK. In January 1983, AIDS was reported among the female partners of men who had the disease suggesting it could be passed on via heterosexual sex. In May, doctors at the Pasteur Institute in France reported the discovery of a new retrovirus called Lymphadenopathy-Associated Virus (or LAV) that could be the cause of AIDS. In the 1980s, as the young died and doctors scrambled for answers, charities, activists, and governments tried to inform the public about a new killer: AIDS. Wellcome Library, London. These posters, collected by the Wellcome Trust, reveal the various messages displayed around the world, amid widespread fear, ignorance, and misinformation about the epidemic. Wellcome Library, London. 

Advertisement for safe sex and the AIDS Information Line in the Netherlands by the Stuurgroep AIDSpreventie Homo’s and Buro GVO Amsterdam. 1991. And this campaign aimed to encourage the use of sex toys, as a fun, safer way of enjoying sex, without penile penetration. Become a BuzzFeed News member. View Comments. ADVERTISEMENT. The media is extremely powerful in promoting health beliefs and in creating role models for contemporary people. The ways in which health is defined or understood can more. Health is a contested concept that has been defined in numerous ways. The media is extremely powerful in promoting health beliefs and in creating role models for contemporary people. (UNAIDS, 2005). Current statistics indicate that approximately 110,000 children in Uganda are presently living with HIV. The number of children on antiretroviral (ARV) treatment has lagged more. HIV prevalence in Uganda is estimated at 6.7%. (UNAIDS, 2005).