



Chronicle of a Plague, Revisited: AIDS and Its Aftermath

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Andrew Holleran's *Ground Zero*, first published in 1988 and consisting of 23 *Christopher Street* essays from the earliest years of the AIDS crisis, was hailed by the *Washington Post* as "one of the best dispatches from the epidemic's height." Twenty years later, with HIV/AIDS long recognized as a global health challenge, Holleran both reiterates and freshly illuminates the devastation wreaked by AIDS, which has claimed the lives of 450,000 gay men as well as 22 million others. *Chronicle of a Plague, Revisited* features ten pieces never previously republished outside *Christopher Street*, as well as a new introduction keenly describing and evaluating a historical moment that still informs and defines today's world-particularly its community of homosexuals, which, arguably, is still recovering from the devastation of AIDS.

Chronicle of a Plague, Revisited: AIDS and Its Aftermath Details

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Author : Andrew Holleran

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Skip says

This is a collection of stories with most of them revolving within the AIDS crisis in the 1980s and 90s. Loss and despair prevail as themes. But so does survival, compassion and unimaginable strength.... The collection, (beautifully written,) serves as a good reminder to all that gay people endured during what has at-times been described as as "our holocaust."

No understanding of the gay experience is complete without some serious reading of all the amazing literature AIDS brought forth.

Lawrence says

Reluctantly read this for all the reasons the author states on the difficulty of writing about AIDS. Appreciated it for its depiction of an essential part of the history of New York City. His friends and their experiences seem strangely familiar yet ultimately unfamiliar to me as I first moved to the city just as the author began to leave it. He mentions Proust several times in the essays and I think his own writing in many ways resembles Proust's.

Trinity says

If you're looking to grasp more at your history, to truly understand queer life in the 80s, this book is one you should pick up.

Adam says

I absolutely loved this book from the moment I opened to page one. Andrew Holleran provided a detailed view of gay life New York in the 1980's, and the beginning of the AIDS crisis. Being gay in the 2000's, I was so moved at reading what my community has been through, and the scares and horrors we faced in the time of my parents, a mere decade before my own birth. "Chronicle Of A Plague, Revisited" truly is a remarkable book, and I highly recommend it to anyone looking to read exactly what is like to be gay back in the 80's.

Kate M. Colby says

This book is a necessity for anyone looking to understand how AIDS impacted gay culture, especially in urban centers like New York, or to appreciate an almost-forgotten way of life.

It is a gripping and heart-wrenching account of AIDS and its impact on gay culture throughout the 1980s and

1990s. While each chapter can be read as a stand-alone piece, Holleran weaves them together beautifully to create a comprehensive look at the effects of AIDS. Unfortunately, the stand-alone pieces do lend themselves to some repetition when the subject matter or persons mentioned are similar or reoccurring.

Overall, Holleran pays homage to the past and gives respect to the essays' presents by telling a tale of binaries: the lively friend who withers away, New York turning from exotic to dangerous, sex moving from liberating and passionate to taboo and deadly. Beyond the physical aspects of AIDS, Holleran grapples with issues of psychology, including survivor's guilt and self-endangerment in the face of trauma. Most importantly, Holleran's narrative keeps alive the stories of his friends who have passed and encapsulates an era of gay culture that younger generations have never known.

The message I take away is this: we cannot forget the horrors of AIDS, for if we do, innocent people will have died in vain and we will open ourselves up to future plagues.

Neil Orts says

See my review in the August 2008 issue of OutSmart. <http://outsmartmagazine.com/home/>

(Holleran is a fine writer. It's a good book.)

aceflor says

Remarkable!

Shannon says

This was a really interesting historical collection of essays. Things I learned:

- hiv/aids had a huge latency, the average survival time after infection was 11 years. Some people acted extremely safe and stopped having sex for 4 years and still got sick; if being sick happened within 48 hours of infection, the epidemic would have played out very differently
- basically any gay person who had sex once in the last 7 years were at risk during times when there wasn't a test (or if there was a test for it there wasn't a cure) so people watched others die but expected they would be next and lived in an extended state of dread
- the culture changed fast, basically sex got associated with death and people stopped having sex
- tons of misinformation out there -- like people claimed they tested negative for hiv and got sick
- The more effective treatments only started in 1996, so basically for almost 20 years having sex could have been a death sentence

There's a pervading sadness but very little resentment or anger or malice. For example, in Randy Shilts' book there is a lot of anger over how people with HIV would knowingly infect others; but Holleran discusses how there could be 100 reasons why someone with HIV would have unprotected sex, including anger, grief, sadness, ignorance, uncertainty, the whole range of making mistakes or poor choices and natural human frailty and weaknesses.

One essay I didn't understand was one where basically gay men talk about the inconvenience of using condoms and basically how using it ruins sex for them and if he's, you know, too into it to think straight he wouldn't grab a condom anyway. I found this REALLY hard to understand. like... straight men use condoms all the time... so it's not exactly a hardship... but it was an essay that brought home the primality of LUST, like people would TRY to not have sex but it was basically impossible.

I found this a really helpful framework to think about comments like how promiscuity was to blame, AIDS was a punishment for sin, etc as totally illogical. I mean: it is a venereal disease so sex/more sex causes it. But it was a time when penicillin could cure anything you could get, people didn't know there was a fatal disease out there, the author says it was like buying a house not knowing it was on a mountain of PCBs, the "stupendous cruelty of this disease" was out of proportion, & it's actually really hard to anyone to have zero sex contact. i mean. straight people have unintended pregnancies & love children & it's not a death sentence & no one says it's a punishment.

I wish the author hadn't removed other essays that he might have thought were inappropriate/too satirical now, and had just reprinted the 1988 work with an expanded introduction. It would have been nice to know what was going on and what they thought then, instead of what the author with the benefit of hindsight thought was more important now.

Perhaps it's not as good as nonfiction retellings as 'and the band played on', but that book talked about dates and numbers and facts; this book seems to be its opposite; it has a lot more heart, is about a moral examining, about nature of grief and remembrance and how people came to terms with themselves and how they chose to live during a horrible time.

Jennifer Collins says

Holleran's essays are a clear look back to the first decade of the HIV/AIDS crisis, centered on New York City and permeated equally by fear and by grief for those lost. In many cases, the essays chronicle the confusion and the sense of helplessness felt in the earliest years when there was virtually no treatment available, and even the hope for a cure that few imagined would still be out of reach decades later. Holleran's mix of the political with the social, and of the personal with the societal, gives this collection the feel of being a view into various windows on reactions to and scenes within New York City as individuals dealt with HIV, and more particularly AIDS itself. While some of the information and debate clearly dates back to the 1980s, and feels so dated, the more striking note for a contemporary reader is how little of the work is actually dated, considering how much time has passed.

On the whole, this work is a fearful look back at the beginning of our country's years dealing with HIV/AIDS, and provides a careful window into what's passed, and what is still ongoing. Holleran's careful attention to individuals, here, is just as noteworthy, and in the end, is the more telling and lasting element of the book as it works as documentation, witness, journal, and elegy.

Recommended.

kim McRad says

as someone who was a wee child during the early days of aids, this book served as an excellent reminder of how far we've come in dealing with hiv. unfortunately i also found it amazing that i still see many of these same attitudes towards hiv, the same attitudes that were so prevalent in the gay male community in the early days can now be found in so many populations that are now becoming disproportionately affected by hiv/aids...the denial, the assumptions about partners, and the prejudices against those who are infected.

Andrew says

Review coming.
