

Fear, bigotry and misinformation – this reminds me of the 1980s Aids pandemic | The Guardian

By Edmund White

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I am a gay man who lived through the Aids pandemic, so many people have asked me to compare that crisis with the one we now face. The main difference between the two is that Aids at first appeared to afflict specific populations, while coronavirus is an equal opportunity malady. I remember when I visited Paris in 1981 I told Michel Foucault, the French philosopher, about Aids and he laughed at this American invention that seemed to target both gay men and Haitians. He said: "That's too perfect, blacks and gays, only American racists and puritans would have come up with that delusion." He died from the disease in 1984.

In the mid-80s, I wrote an article in which I said American gays, at least younger ones, had worked through their self-hatred in the post-Stonewall 70s but that internalised homophobia had come back with the Aids stigma in the 1980s. We knew we were a hated community; relatives wouldn't let us hold their babies. Eventually the viral nature of the disease became known and we discovered the only two significant modes of transmission were blood and semen, but in the early days people feared physical contact, mosquitoes, kisses, coughs. Actually, coronavirus is [much more easily communicated](#) than Aids ever was.

[...]

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