Republican Party Throughout The Beginning Of The Aids Crisis

During the 1980s, party politics relied on their platforms for support during elections. However, the conservative party had become heavily supported by an Evangelical following, making the republican party semi-controlled by a church sect. This connection between religion and the state was particularly emphasized during the years of the AIDS Crisis, where many gay men began contracting the disease Human Immunodeficiency Virus, HIV, that eventually caused Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome or AIDS. This disease seriously weakened the body and damaged the immune system, making it hard for the ill to stop infections. While politicians like Reagan eventually supported research to prevent AIDS, the intense need for the Evangelical vote and the general homophobia that surrounded homosexuality in the 1980s caused President Reagan's prolonged silence that delayed treatment of the crisis. The Republican party relied on Evangelical support in order to obtain power, which meant that it had to somewhat go along with the church's basic morals. These ethics coupled with the homophobia of the time period heavily influenced the politician Ronald Reagan and his response to the AIDS Crisis, despite warnings from his advisers and health professionals.

The tenants of the Evangelical faith caused followers to advocate for more conservative policies in the government once the AIDS Crisis emerged. At the time, many Evangelicals believed in abstinence-only education and the idea that marriage was between a man and a woman. [1] So, when the AIDS Crisis broke out, many were against helping the ill. In fact, to Evangelicals, the crisis actually confirmed what they believed. They saw the disease as condemnation for gay people, citing the illness as retribution for sin. As Jerry Falwell, the Evangelical founder of the conservative group Moral Majority, said, "AIDS is not just God's punishment for homosexuals. It is God's punishment for a society that tolerates homosexuals." [2] The mindset that society must also be corrected led to a push for more religious politics. Evangelicals now began to fight more intensely for "pro-family" ideals which stressed heterosexual, monogamous, marriages. [3] They even started advocating to limit the rights of those who tested positive to HIV. [4] At the beginning of the AIDS Crisis, the overwhelming amount of gay men being diagnosed spurred Evangelicals to rally behind traditional values. [1: Anthony M. Petro, After the Wrath of God: AIDS, Sexuality, and American Religion (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), 19.] [2: Petro, After the Wrath, 24.] [3: Emily Mason Linthicum, 'Reframing a Pandemic: HIV/AIDS and Conservative Evangelical Discourse in the United States (PhD diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 2013), 106, accessed February 18, 2019, https://search-proquest-com.proxy.hw.com/docview/1448527072/7DD6AAD78EA4AA8PQ/1?accountid=6094.] [4: Linthicum, 'Reframing a Pandemic,' 106.]

In this society that was shifting to heavily rely on American Christian values, misinformation and extreme homophobia made HIV/AIDS research and funding difficult to obtain. When the AIDS Crisis began in the early 1980s, only gay men were being diagnosed with AIDS, so the disease began being known as "gay cancer." [5] At the time, homosexuality was only just becoming a part of human rights discussions. [6] To counteract this, conservative Christians started using public fear and speculation to describe HIV/AIDS as a disease that could only affect gay people. [7] The stressed links between AIDS and gay people stigmatized the community as a whole. Many gay people felt as though they had something to be ashamed of. They were scared,

grieving, and outraged at the reputation their community was receiving because of the virus. [8] The LGBT community was now a hypersexualized one. [9] A gross overgeneralization, the Christian society that was scared of punishment for accepting homosexuality condemned the community and any medical research of AIDS. The lack of understanding of the disease meant that the conservative society refused to acknowledge it as anything other than a gay disease and the stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS only grew. [5: Petro, After the Wrath, 23.] [6: Dennis Altman, 'HIV, Homophobia, and Human Rights,' Health and Human Rights 2, no. 4 (1998): 20, https://doi.org/10.2307/4065184.] [7: Petro, After the Wrath, 25.] [8: Deborah B. Gould, Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight against AIDS (n.p.: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 12.] [9: Altman, 'HIV, Homophobia,' 17.]

The conservative party's reliance on the Evangelical vote led to the party platform being structured around religious ideology, especially during the AIDS Crisis. Beginning in the 1970s, the Republican party found itself counting on most strongly on Evangelicals, with an emphasis on "faith based activism." [10] This vote was crucial to their success. [11] Their dependence on this demographic mean that the party had to cater to their target voters. Republicans were controlled by the prevailing Evangelical ideas of homophobia and religious ideals. The AIDS Crisis was the perfect thing for the conservative party to use show their support of Evangelical morals. The epidemic of "gay cancer" allowed for the Christian right to make AIDS into a political issue. The Republican platform encouraged debates about the sinfulness of homosexuality and pushed the "pro-family" ideals that were crucial to earning the vote. [12] Now that AIDS was a political subject, the right was allowed to capitalize on it for political gain. [10: Petro, After the Wrath, 19.] [11: Linthicum, 'Reframing a Pandemic,' 106.] [12: Petro, After the Wrath, 23]

Having been elected into office, Republicans furthered their own political agenda while upholding Evangelical standards through systemic oppression manipulation. As prominent conservatives became officials, they began enacting policies that made homophobia institutional. In 1986, about five years after the crisis started, the United States Supreme Court ruled that sodomy laws created in Georgia–a state that is mostly Evangelical–were constitutional in the case Bowers v Hardwick. [13] This ruling allowed for AIDS discrimination in the workplace, meaning that homophobia was now protected by the government. The, in 1987, Senator Jesse Helms advocated for constitutional amendments that would ban AIDS programs that condoned homosexuality and immigrants who tested positive for HIV from entering the country. [14] Homophobia became rooted in the laws of the United States by officials who were supported by traditionalists who wanted "family values." The government tried to cover this up to preserve an image to the outside world, however, this was only a façade. The United States tried to frame AIDS as a global problem and while that was true, this was used to hide the fact that the government was not doing as much to help stop the crisis domestically. [15] As much as the US did to bring attention to AIDS in developing countries, the lack of care and active policy-making that went into hurting those diagnosed in America was a result of the government continuing to appeal to Evangelical concerns. [13: Emily K. Hobson, 'LGBTQ Politics in America since 1945,' Oxford Research Encyclopedias, last modified November 2017, http://oxfordre.com/americanhistory/abstract/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.001.0001/acrefore-9780199329175-e-234?rskey=fH9p2M&result=1#acrefore-9780199329175-e-234-note-59.] [14: Hobson, 'LGBTQ Politics,' Oxford Research Encyclopedias.] [15: Linthicum, 'Reframing a Pandemic,' 105.]

Throughout the beginning of the AIDS Crisis, Ronald Reagan was the president of the United

States; however, having been elected by the conservative right, his drawn-out silence about the topic and eventual addressment was handled in a manner that would favor those who elected him, not those who were dying. As the president, Reagan's neglect of those suffering from the deadly virus hindered research and left more to die without any progress being made on his part. His refusal to speak was large because it would alienate some of core following: Evangelicals. Throughout his years in office, Reagan only seriously addressed the topic of AIDS three times. [16] The first time he spoke on the subject, it was in 1985, four years after the AIDS had been given epidemic status. [17] Here, he claimed that research was a top priority for him, however, that same year, Reagan proposed to spend only $126 million dollars on research and when told by scientists that it wasn't enough, he became defensive. [18] Throughout his time as president, Reagan consistently underfunded AIDS research. When given large budgets, Reagan refused to spend most of the money, forcing congress to increase the funding, and even attempts to cut $40 million dollars from research, but is denied. [19] Instead of trying to help the cause, Reagan followed the advice of his voter base and advocated for abstinence-only education. [20] To Reagan, silence and Christian morality were the only way to solve the epidemic. [16: Saul Friedman, 'Reagan's Moral Stand on AIDS He Urges Abstinence, Monogamy,' Newsday Washington Bureau (New York, NY), April 2, 1987, http://proxy.hw.com/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/277807779?accountid=609.] [17: Philip Boffey, 'Reagan Defends Financing for AIDS,' The New York Times (New York, NY), September 18, 1985, https://search-proquest-com.proxy.hw.com/docview/425515263/69724747FF2D4D10PQ/1?accountid=6094.] [18: Friedman, 'Reagan's Moral'.] [19: Boffey, 'Reagan Defends'.] [20: Boffey, 'Reagan Defends'.]

These beliefs were sustained throughout his administration, as Evangelical voters influenced how AIDS was dealt with beyond Reagan. After Reagan's delayed first public acknowledgment of AIDS, he barely encouraged his administration to work on anything. Much of what Reagan did was in order to preserve his image. At one point, he gave a speech stating that finding a cure for AIDS was his top priority and then later that day his administration attempted to cut the funding for research. [21] Reagan was motivated to talk about the crisis by the public outcry that was demanding to hear something from him, yet he tried to harm the very cause he claimed was important so that he could keep his voters happy. He also called for the formation of an AIDS commission, however, it was made up of homophobic conservatives, one gay man, and no AIDS activists. [22] This commission was ineffective and was only truly made for appearance's sake. Rather than actually help the crisis, Reagan and his administration instead worked on pleasing Evangelical voters by doing essentially nothing for the cause while upholding their image. [21: Stephen F. Knott and Jeffrey L. Chidester, The Reagan Years (n.p.: Facts On File, 2005), 47, https://ebooks.infobase.com/PortalPlaylists.aspx?wID=226702&ISBN=9780816074655.] [22: Hobson, 'LGBTQ Politics,' Oxford Research Encyclopedias.] As Reagan postponed discussing the topic of AIDS, thousands of people in the United States died