



AIDS and American Apocalypticism: The Cultural Semiotics of an Epidemic (SUNY series in the Sociology of Culture)

Thomas L. Long

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Looks at how both anti-gay and AIDS activists use apocalyptic language to describe the AIDS crisis.

Since public discourse about AIDS began in 1981, it has characterized AIDS as an apocalyptic plague: a punishment for sin and a sign of the end of the world. Christian fundamentalists had already configured the gay male population most visibly affected by AIDS as apocalyptic signifiers or signs of the "end times." Their discourse grew out of a centuries-old American apocalypticism that included images of crisis, destruction, and ultimate renewal. In this book, Thomas L. Long examines the ways in which gay and AIDS activists, artists, writers, scientists, and journalists appropriated this apocalyptic rhetoric in order to mobilize attention to the medical crisis, prevent the spread of the disease, and treat the HIV infected.

Using the analytical tools of literary analysis, cultural studies, performance theory, and social semiotics, *AIDS and American Apocalypticism* examines many kinds of discourse, including fiction, drama, performance art, demonstration graphics and brochures, biomedical publications, and journalism and shows that, while initially useful, the effects of apocalyptic rhetoric in the long term are dangerous. Among the important figures in AIDS activism and the arts discussed are David Drake, Tim Miller, Sarah Schulman, and Tony Kushner, as well as the organizations ACT UP and Lesbian Avengers.

"Beyond being an important look at the effect of religiously inspired rhetoric on LGBT lives, this book is also an impressive documentation of queer responses to HIV/AIDS in the 1980s and 1990s, and a hugely helpful repository and remembrance of art and activism in the face of loss." — *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*

"His effort to 'acknowledge the value of religious discourse without endorsing its claims to represent the real' is an impressive and important insight." — *CHOICE*

"Thomas L. Long offers perceptive readings of recent novels and dramas and links the discussion to his broader argument. His insights and conclusions are shrewd and certainly help one think about the works in fresh and illuminating ways." — Paul S. Boyer, Editor-in-Chief of *The Oxford Companion to United States History*

"This book is impressive in its depth of scholarship and fascinating to read." — Susan J. Palmer, author of *AIDS as an Apocalyptic Metaphor in North America*

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