

FAMILY VALUES

In February 1989, author Larry Kramer outed President Ronald Reagan's son Ron on CNN's Larry King show.



Ron Reagan

"The irony is Nancy's best friends are gay and their son Ron Reagan is gay—the essence is that Ronald Reagan and Nancy Reagan have sold their son down the river," he said. "Ron Reagan could have been the biggest hero in the world if he had the courage to come forth and say he was gay, to shame and encourage his parents to do something about this epidemic, but because he didn't, more of us are dead."

Confronted on his own television show by outing inventor Michelangelo Signorile in 1991, Ron Reagan described himself as "straight." He called the accusation "insulting to my wife of 11 years because it says she's living a lie, and I don't like that."

Signorile responded that he'd heard Ron's wife was a lesbian.

In August 1992, Reagan daughter Patti Davis told *The Advocate* that her parents think homosexuality is "abnormal. I certainly don't think they feel that whatever someone's sexual preference is, is OK. They think that God made men and women to make love and any variation on that theme is in some way blasphemous."

—RW

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The *San Francisco Sunday Examiner and Chronicle* reported that the PSA amounted to an apology for Reagan's neglect of the epidemic while in office. Today, numerous Web sites offer an AIDS timeline that contains the sentence, "1990: Ronald Reagan apologizes for his neglect of the epidemic while he was president."

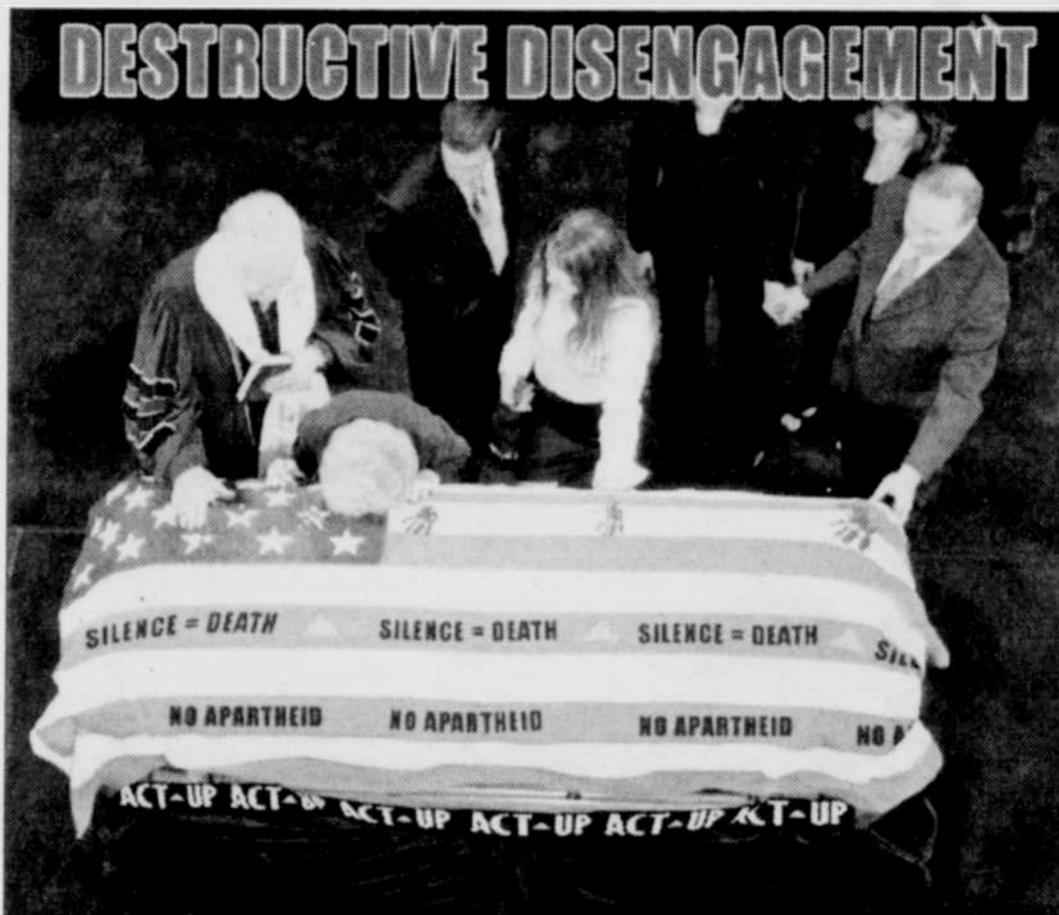
However, journalist Andrew Miller said: "That's a lot of bullshit. Reagan said no such thing. I was editor of *Outweek* at the time."

In February of that same year, Reagan visited children with AIDS at the University of California Medical Center in Los Angeles. He said, "I hope my visit will bring more attention to the need to do something about this horrible disease."

On his way into the hospital, Reagan was confronted by ACT UP's John Fall, who screamed: "You are a murderer and a hypocrite. If you had done something eight years ago these children wouldn't be dying."

Reagan also published a tribute to hemophiliac AIDS victim Ryan White in *The Washington Post* on April 11, 1990.

"Sadly, Ryan's is not the only life to have been cut short by AIDS," he wrote. "In a most poignant way, he told us of a health crisis in



San Francisco artist and political agitator Clinton Fein altered a photo from Reagan's funeral service to sum up how some members of the queer and AIDS communities feel about the Gipper's reign

our country that has claimed too many victims. There have been too many funerals like his. There are too many patches in the quilt. We owe it to Ryan to make sure that the fear and ignorance that chased him from his home and his school will be eliminated. We owe it to Ryan to open our hearts and our minds to those with AIDS. We owe it to Ryan to be compassionate, caring and tolerant toward those with AIDS, their families and friends. It's

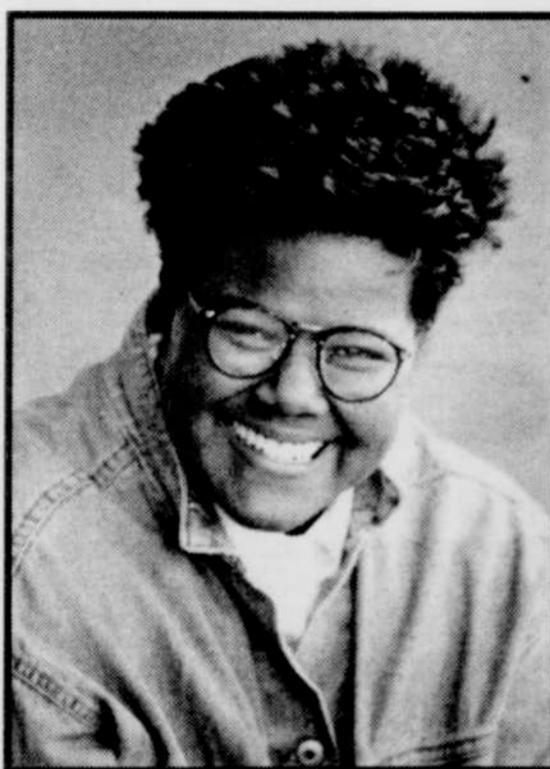
the disease that's frightening, not the people who have it."

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's Robert Bray was wholly unimpressed.

"We urge our leaders to take action while they hold positions of power, not after they reach the safety of retirement and are outside the spotlight of public scrutiny," he said. "Some will salute Mr. Reagan for his post-presidential words on AIDS. But for all the children alienated from their schools because they had HIV, and all the families bombed out of their homes by hysterical neighbors, and all the IV drug users, black, Hispanic and Asian people with AIDS, and all the gay men who died alone in some anonymous hospital room, for all these people there was no editorial. There was no PSA. There was no Great Communicator offering compassion or action. There was only presidential negligence and a legacy of shame."

The head of the Portland-based Cascade AIDS Project also lamented Reagan's inaction on the epidemic.

"Ronald Reagan is one of the reasons we still have an HIV epidemic in this country in 2004," executive director Thomas Bruner told *Just Out*. "His failure of leadership on this issue while president was both astonishing and unconscionable and continues to bear tragic consequences today." □



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