

AIDS lecture March 31, 1988

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AIDS: What We All Need To Know
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Presented to the Ford Hall Forum
Boston, Massachusetts
March 31, 1988

It was only one day since I had last spoken to a public audience at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center on the subject of the AIDS epidemic.

This was the second time that I had spoken to the Ford Hall Forum. The other occasion was to address an audience on the scourge of smoking -- the other great public health menace during my tenure as Surgeon General. On both occasions, the venue was Fanueill Hall in Boston, which was a particular delight to me. There was a huge throne-like chair on the platform pushed back against the wall in which I sat while being introduced. Above me, on what seemed like a very flimsy shelf, there was a marble bust of John Adams, the second president of the United States. In spite of what some people might think, I was not around during the days of John Adams, but he was very important to the role I was then playing. It was John Adams who had brought into being the Marine Hospital Service, which later became the United States Public Health Service of which I was the Commander-in-Chief -- the Surgeon General.

The Ford Hall Forums were also broadcast by radio to a large audience and that made this venue all the more ideal to get out the message the government was most concerned about.

Again, with the frequency with which I was being asked to speak on AIDS, I felt I had to use a previous lecture and selected the one I had most recently given on March 6th, 1988 to the National Association of Secondary School Principals. This Ford Hall audience seemed much the same sort of people and therefore, I used that same lecture. I introduced it by telling the audience that I appreciated the opportunity of speaking to them, although I was aware that the public might be on the verge of suffering from message overload in reference to AIDS. Although I was still the unofficial spokesperson for the government in reference to AIDS, other people were beginning to speak and write about the epidemic as well. I'm not referring to scientific lectures given by people like Fauci and Gallo, but rather to two things that happened just before this meeting. First, Dr. Robert Gould had told the presumably heterosexual readers of *Cosmopolitan* that there was no need to worry about AIDS -- in view of later developments as poor advice as he could have given. Then, Masters, Johnson & Kolodny published a book that said that we should be worried, after all, about all the things I had been telling the public could never give you AIDS.

I became involved in that controversy in the following way. While I was in London speaking at the first meeting on the Global Impact of AIDS in early March of 1988, my wife called me and recounted what she had seen on *Good Morning America* when Masters, Johnson & Kolodny's book on AIDS was reviewed for that morning show. Betty was aware that there was contradiction to everything that I had said would not cause AIDS and should not be worried about by the public. She called me to alert me about how widely that word would be disseminated through *Good Morning America*. I called my good friend Timothy Johnson, the medical editor of ABC and the next day, I was able to sit in the BBC studios in London and appear on *Good Morning America* and denounce the content of the new book. I had an immediate response and abject apology from Masters & Johnson who apologized for having done anything to get in the way of the messages I had been delivering and especially regretful that anything that appeared in the book might have led people to the wrong information. This led me to believe that Masters & Johnson knew very little about the content of that book and it was really the work of their new co-author Kolodny.

In any event, Ellen Goodman picked up on all this and suggested that this was so much an epidemic of AIDS as it was an epidemic of AIDS experts. I hope she was using the word expert facetiously, because there was nothing expert about the Masters, Johnson & Kolodny book.

With that specific introduction to what was going on in America at the time of my appearance at the Ford Hall Forum, I refer the user to the introductions to this lecture mentioned above and because it can be found elsewhere, there is no index.
