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**HIV/AIDS Epidemic:**

At seven, my father passed away from HIV/AIDS, I was unaware of his cause of death and was told he died from cancer. It was hard to accept death at a young age; I never really took interest in anything except school and family. Once he died, nothing seemed important to me, I just wanted to go wherever he went. I thought that if I died sooner I would see him again, in heaven.

I became suicidal and began attending grief counseling; learning other ways to deal with his death. The counselors advised taking one positive thing, putting my mind on it, and extract frustration on that. From this incentive, I was inspired to create in my mind, a world where I am leader of my success in which no person or incident can interfere. I began playing basketball and taking all my aggression out on the court. In school, everything was a competition, turning in homework, presenting excellent projects and acing tests was my way of dealing with grief.

Meanwhile, I was always being taken to the doctor to have blood

Submitted at City Council

Date 9/19/07 Item #65

drawn and never wanted to think that it had anything to do with my father's passing.

Upon turning thirteen, my mother told me that my father really died from HIV/AIDS, and the thirteenth year was an important year securing my status. All of my dreams began to plunge, all of my hard work in school and sports seemed unimportant because my life felt like it was being cut short. It did not seem fair; the world I created in mind was completely destroyed in less than an hour.

No one understood why I cared so much about everything being perfect, but inside I treated every opportunity as if it was my last; I lived for today and tomorrow's satisfaction. Through this habit of life my character of strong intuition and flawlessness commenced.

In the United States HIV/AIDS epidemic is a crisis that has hit African Americans the hardest. The reasons are not directly related to race or ethnicity, but rather to some of the barriers faced by many African Americans. These barriers can include poverty,

sexually transmitted diseases, and stigma (negative attitudes, beliefs, and actions directed at people living with HIV/AIDS or directed at people who do things that might put them at risk for HIV). Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is a collection of symptoms and infections resulting from the specific damage to the immune system caused by the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome) was first reported in the United States on June 5, 1981 and has since become a major worldwide epidemic.

HIV is spread most commonly by having unprotected sex with an infected partner. It is also transmitted through the form of “anal, vaginal, oral sex, blood transfusion, contaminated hypodermic needles, childbirth, or breastfeeding” (Wikipedia, 2).

African Americans have been disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS since the epidemic’s beginning, and that disparity has deepened over time. Although African Americans represent only

12% of the U.S. population, they account for half of AIDS cases diagnosed in 2005.

Today, there are approximately 1.2 million people living with HIV/AIDS in the U.S, including more than 500,000 who are Black (KFF).

The AIDS case rate per 100,000 among Black adults/adolescents was 10 times that of whites in 2005 (Figure 2). The AIDS case rate for Black men (103.6) was the highest of any group, followed by Black women (49.9). By comparison, the rate among white men was 13.1.

African American Leaders and Celebrities believe that the following are the <sup>6</sup>seven significant reasons why HIV/AIDS is ravaging their community:

**1. Denial:**

Even the most devastating statistics, such as the fact that African Americans have accounted for 38 percent of all U.S. AIDS deaths, can't compete with the perfect storm of denial and

sexually transmitted diseases, and stigma (negative attitudes, beliefs, and actions directed at people living with HIV/AIDS or directed at people who do things that might put them at risk for HIV). Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is a collection of symptoms and infections resulting from the specific damage to the immune system caused by the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome) was first reported in the United States on June 5, 1981 and has since become a major worldwide epidemic.

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ignorance, which conspire to prevent young people from protecting themselves.

## **2. HIV Testing:**

Many blacks with HIV do not get tested until an AIDS-related sickness lands them in the emergency room. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that 56 percent of all "late testers" people who develop AIDS within a year of getting tested are African Americans.

## **3. The Down Low:**

Most African-American advocates agree that the "down low" is nine parts media hype, one part reality. They say that the notion of black men "on the down low" (self-described heterosexuals in relationships with women, but secretly sleeping with men) infecting black women has obstructed the community's collective understanding of the epidemic: It reinforces the myth that AIDS is a gay-only disease.

#### **4. Money:**

**U.S. Senator Barack Obama, a Democrat from Illinois, takes President Bush to task for his failure to put money where his mouth is when he says,**

**The President has specifically acknowledged the disproportionate burden of the epidemic on women and communities of color. Yet, this public recognition simply has not translated into adequate investment in HIV/AIDS programs,**

**Obama charges.**

## **5. Healthcare Access:**

Longstanding neglect and, occasionally, outright abuse of African-Americans by both public and private medical systems have contributed enormously to the spread of HIV. In turn, longstanding suspicion and, occasionally, irrational paranoia of the healthcare system by African Americans has only exacerbated a vicious cycle. While accesses to a doctor and to HIV medications are necessary, those steps are not sufficient by themselves. The practical and emotional requirements of daily life must also be met in order for African Americans with HIV to succeed at sticking to their HIV treatment regimens, and to cope with the many other complexities of managing their disease. Housing, nutrition, transportation, child care, mental health counseling, drug and alcohol detox the list is long, the cost is high, and the willingness of the U.S. government to foot the bill for those who cannot themselves afford it is wearing thin.

## **6. Stigma:**

Stigma is often cited by advocates as the leading HIV/AIDS issue confronting the black community, because it is at the root of so many other issues: denial, homophobia, the down low, the black church, late testing, inadequate prevention efforts, myths about HIV and, above all, the silence surrounding the virus.

The day that my life changed forever was two months after I turned thirteen, my doctor advised that my status was negative for HIV/AIDS. My life took a drastic and meaningful change for the better. Not only did I utilize my preceding habits; but the world that I had previously created was reconstructed in my mind. Once again, I was the leader of my success. When I graduated from Middle School I set high expectations for my high school education. Entering into high school I applied one dictum, "believe, achieve and receive what you sew," if I put out the effort and hard work the results would substantiate. From then on, I would not let anything get in the way of my education, career, or

life. I knew that if I could make it past HIV/AIDS, then I could make it through anything.

Through joy I was able to declare through a poem in my grandmother's Bible:

"Some through the waters, some through the flood,

Some through the fire-But all through the blood,

Some through great sorrows

-But God gives us a song-

In the night season-And all day long.

My prayer is a simple one, Lord,

Whatever is best for me, do;

In sickness, in health I desire,

What brings the most glory to you,

For prayer is the soil in which HOPE

And HEALING grows best and true.

Each morning when I wake I say,

"I place my hand in God's today."

I know He'll walk close by my side.

My every wandering step to guide.  
He leads me with the tenderest care  
When paths are dark and I despair ---  
No need for me to understand  
If I but hold fast to His hand.  
My hand in His! No surer way  
To walk in safety through each day.  
By His great bounty I am fed;  
Warmed by His love, and comforted.  
When at day's end I seek my rest.  
And realize how much I'm blessed,  
My thanks pour out to Him; and then  
I place my hand in God's again."