"Silence = Death" Poster

Creator: The Silence = Death Project  
Date: 1987  
Source type: Image (Poster)

Introduction: This poster was designed in 1987 by a group of six AIDS activists who called themselves the “Silence = Death Project.” The poster’s designers later joined ACT UP and gave ACT UP the image. ACT UP copied the image onto items such as billboards, pins, and T-shirts.

Why is Reagan silent about AIDS? What is really going on at the Center for Disease Control, the Federal Drug Administration, and the Vatican? Gays and lesbians are not expendable. Use your power. Vote. Boycott. Defend yourselves. Turn anger, fear, grief into action.
A Journalist Describes ACT UP and the "Silence = Death" Poster

Creator: Dave Ford
Date: 1989
Published in: SPIN MAGAZINE
Source type: Article (secondary source)

Introduction: In this article written for SPIN, a magazine about music and culture, journalist Dave Ford described the goals of ACT UP, and the way the organization used the “Silence = Death” poster to achieve these goals.

ACT UP has swelled into a large group dedicated to utilizing street demonstration tactics to achieve two goals: 1) to change public opinion about AIDS, and 2) to press for faster AIDS-drug trials and drug dissemination from federal agencies like the Food and Drug Administration, which have been known to be slow to respond.

“The ultimate power rests with change and/or creating public opinion,” says Michael Signorile, 26, ACT UP-NY’s Media Coordinator.

ACT UP’s well known “Silence = Death” graphic adorns T-shirts, posters, and the small round stickers that have been appearing on surfaces all across the country. It shows a right-side-up pink triangle, a subversion of the Nazi symbol for homosexuals, floating on a stark black background.

ACT UP members carry rolls of the stickers everywhere. In Atlanta during the Democratic Convention, stickers peppered news boxes, telephone poles, windows, doors, cars, buses – everywhere they would stick. The “Silence = Death” logo became the dominant visual symbol of the movement. The idea is to change public opinion beginning on the street. “When you put these posters and stickers all over town, people are forced to confront what they think they know and what the newspapers tell them,” says ACT UP’s David Glips, 26, “It’s incredibly effective.” The group also sells the shirts, stickers, and buttons to raise money.

Using art, video, fashion, and theatrical demonstration styles that almost resemble performance art, ACT UP has put a new twist on older versions of street activism.