Death Wish

The rise and fall of political funerals

May 1, 2004 By James Baggett

"Born in Flames," a March 1999 *POZ* tribute to artist David Wojnarowicz, shows how death's devastation can inspire a desperate act. An excerpt:"Seven years ago, as a final wish, activist and fashion designer Tim Bailey requested that we, his friends—a rag-tag ACT UP/New York affinity group made up of writers, waiters and various other professionals-turned-activists—deliver his lifeless, AIDS-ravaged body to Bill Clinton's doorstep.... We read an incendiary 1991 text by artist David Wojnarowicz [1954–1992]:

> *I imagine what it would be like if, each time a lover, friend or stranger died of this disease, their friends, lovers or neighbors would take the dead body and drive with it in a car a hundred miles an hour to Washington, DC....*

A friend in the funeral business embalmed [Tim Bailey's] too-slender body and we drove it in a rented van full-speed across four state lines to our nation's capital, where we were met by trucked-in activists ready to conduct his ad hoc funeral right in front of the White House. We were set upon by no less than three law-enforcement agencies and escorted out of town by a dozen police cruisers—with full lights and sirens. Tim had wanted his funeral to be fierce and defiant, to make the public statement that his death from AIDS was a form of political assassination."

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