St. Louis Blues

November 1, 2001 By Suzy Martin

In St. Louis, a city with some 4,000 PWAs where blacks are nine times more likely than whites to get HIV, you might think citizens would appreciate some public displays of prevention. Well, think again. Less than 24 hours after a government-funded series of 9 safe-sex billboards went up in different districts, Mayor Francis Slay ordered them down, citing indecency complaints from local yokels.

Now, we're not talking even *soft* porn. The billboards depict two black men in a tender embrace, and the cries of "Not in My Backyard" came from the predominantly white Hill 'hood, says Erise Williams, director of Blacks Assisting Blacks Against AIDS, a St. Louis-based AIDS service organization. Of course, in black neighborhoods, too, "some people sprayed graffiti or tried to take them down," Williams says, "but never went so far as to call the mayor." (The mayor's office and the St. Louis Department of Health both refused to comment to *POZ*.)

A case of double trouble with gay and black eroticism? Yes, Williams says, but the ads were targeted for the Hill specifically because of its gay residents and AIDS caseload, among the highest in the city. Now local gay and AIDS groups are looking for a private donor to sponsor the ads -- no government coins means no government control.

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