Strange Days Indeed

POZ presents the 24 times in 2004 when an HIVer had to stop and ask, “What’s in this cocktail, anyway?”

January 1, 2005 By Staff

JANUARY 20

AIDS Quilt dad **Cleve Jones** sues its overseers, claiming they unjustly fired him for planning to display all 40,000 panels of the big blanket—a first since 1996. His aim? To get AIDS into the election.

FEBRUARY 07

Ongoing reports of multidrug-resistant **staph infections** (MRSA) causing nasty skin infections in HIVers prompt the CDC to hold a conference call with gay-health honchos in seven cities. (Ah, we didn’t know they cared.)

FEBRUARY 16

In a public statement, 60 top researchers from all fields—including **20 Nobel laureates**—demand that Bush and buds stop distorting science for political ends (like dissing condoms). Shrub only shrugs.

MARCH 13

Eighty HIVers pose naked on a freezing morning for the cover of *POZ*’s 10th anniversary May issue. The intimacy, intensity and immediate international coverage of the event—created by artist **Spencer Tunick**—turn the chills to thrills.

APRIL 11

It’s coitus interruptus across the condom-snubbing straight **porn industry** when one busy male performer—and four women (not pictured)—test positive. Despite bad press, fines and threats by pols to force condom use, the industry is soon back to bangin’ as usual—and resumes its “safe” policy of mandatory testing every three months.

APRIL 16

Oprah shocks black America when her show explores black men doing each other “on the down low”—and putting their ladies at risk for HIV. A month later, La Winfrey sits down with **Diane Sawyer** on prime-time TV to share her efforts in aiding thousands of South African AIDS orphans.

MAY 6

A court in “reformed” Libya sentences **five Bulgarian nurses** and one Palestinian doc to death by firing squad for supposedly infecting 400 local kids with HIV—likely a coverup of its own tainted-blood scandal. No shots have been fired.

MAY 16
Pressured to buy generic HIV meds with U.S. global-AIDS funds, Bushies announce a new (widely viewed as redundant) **FDA fast-track review** for such meds. Foreign generics makers refuse to apply.

MAY 20
As NAPWA and others howl, the CDC throws $49 million at groups to do its mandated **“prevention for positives”**—testing, not condoms. Two-thirds of orgs focused on neggies lose their funding.

MAY 26
As part of a settlement over barbaric HIV care at **Limestone Correctional Facility**, sick inmates are no longer made to line up at 3 a.m. for meds, or to take them without food, among other long-due upgrades.

JUNE 16
Robert Mugabe, repressive, homophobic head of AIDS-ravaged Zimbabwe, confirms repeated rumors that yes, he, too, has lost relatives to AIDS. The admission follows similar ones from Malawi prez **Bakili Muluzi** and South African pol **Mangosuthu Buthelezi**.

JUNE 23
In a campaign speech at a black Philly church, abstinence-only ayatollah **George W. Bush** throws a first-ever crumb to condom use, prompting front-page *New York Times* coverage and gaga press releases from groveling gay groups. The C-word is not repeated.

JULY 12
A week after launching a celebrity-driven condom campaign in India, actor **Richard Gere** criticizes the Bush administration’s lack of “sanity” about rubbers at the 15th world AIDS confab in Bangkok. Three months later, Gere takes his condom crusade to Russia.

JULY 24
A Florida paper reveals that some Sunshine State counties are charging **positive prostitutes**—snared in sting operations—with criminal transmission, despite little evidence of unsafe sex. Maximum sentence? Five years.

JULY 25
Scott Hitt (above left), founder of the American Academy of HIV Medicine, forfeits his MD license and admits to fondling patients. The group quickly moves from LA to DC, tapping community favorite Big Apple HIV doc **Howard Grossman** for the top post in September.

AUGUST 2

In a year of long-overdue progressive initiatives to limit its exploding AIDS epidemic (not including arrests of activists in HIV hot spot Henan province, that is), **China** announces it will provide free condoms to its estimated 850,000 HIVers. Not all, however, will be plastic-wrapped in the flag.

AUGUST 3
HIVers with lipoatrophy rejoice when cheek filler **Sculptra** (formerly New-Fill) gets an FDA OK—a first for domestic lipo. But gratitude turns to groans when maker Dermik prices it at $480 a bottle, nearly four times the EU cost.

AUGUST 26–SEPTEMBER 2
At the **Republican National Convention** in New York City, **ACT UP** grabs world attention with a naked, traffic-jamming "Stop AIDS" demo—and a short, explosive protest at an infiltrated GOP-youth rally.

SEPTEMBER 19
HBO's AIDS flashback ***Angels in America*** scores 11 Emmy awards, a record for a miniseries. Taking their bows, winners **Meryl Streep, Al Pacino** and director **Mike Nichols** (who says, "AIDS isn't over yet, and we must do what we can for Africa") offer a healthy dose of HIV for millions of TV viewers.

OCTOBER 5
During the vice-presidential debates, moderator **Gwenn Ifill** asks each candidate what he'd do about black American women's high risk of AIDS. **John Edwards** skirts the question completely, while **Dick Cheney** frankly admits that he's "not aware" of the stats, provoking partisan outrage.

OCTOBER 12
Defending his request for a public state registry of HIVers, Maryland comptroller **William Schaefer** calls PWAs "a danger," adding, "They bring [HIV] on themselves." Fielding furious demands that he step down, Schaefer backtracks a bit, saying that he meant a list of "known givers of HIV."

OCTOBER 24
HIVer writer/activist **Larry Kramer** is saluted at a New York City gala, capping a banner year that includes not only a triumphant revival of his 1985 AIDS drama *The Normal Heart* but the 69-year-old liver transplantee's stirring postelection speech to a packed crowd of Gotham gays seeking action.

OCTOBER 29
PLO head **Yasir Arafat** is flown to a Paris hospital with a "secret blood disease." With the cause still secret at his Nov. 11 death, the media widely reports not gay press and Internet rumors he was bisexual and had HIV but Palestinian rumors Israel poisoned him.

NOVEMBER 2
President George W. Bush is elected to a second term in office, defeating John Kerry with 51 percent of the popular vote. Many 49 percenters suddenly see the future as a choice between

fleeing to Canada or being marched to the gas chambers. For once, we at *POZ* advise keeping a cool head and a sense of humor. HIVers are made of stronger stuff than that.

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