



Advocates Try to Halt a Wacky, Dangerous Book from an HIV Denialist

The forthcoming book is the latest in ludicrous claims, feeding off scientific distrust, that HIV does not cause AIDS.

March 20, 2023 By [Mark S. King](#)

We all know the saying about freedom of speech. It doesn't mean you have the right to yell "fire!" in a crowded movie theater. That kind of speech can risk lives.

But what if the theater is already burning on all sides, and someone tries to convince people not to find a safe exit, that the approaching flames can't possibly harm them, or that the fire itself is a myth or a conspiracy?

Clearly, this is just as dangerous, and the very reason that a group of HIV activists and public health experts are moving to halt the publication of a book set to be released next week by a subsidiary of Simon & Schuster.

The Real AIDS Epidemic: How the Tragic HIV Mistake Threatens Us All, by HIV denialist Rebecca Culshaw, is the latest in decades of wacko musings from those who would have us believe that HIV doesn't cause AIDS.

AIDS denialism took hold nearly as soon as HIV was identified in 1984, when our understanding of the roots and causes of AIDS were still in their infancy. It was fertile ground for people distrustful of science or government.

There were a lot of people living with HIV back then who became AIDS denialists. They're dead.

The COVID fiasco has led to a resurgence of those same misgivings. Enter Ms. Culshaw and her new book, which reportedly covers the same ludicrous territory as so many AIDS denialists before her.

These half-baked theories are not simply unsound. They can be disastrous to public health and to the need for HIV testing and treatment.

Today, a large group of activists, organizations and public health experts [released a letter to Jonathan Karp, President and Chief Executive Officer of Simon & Schuster](#), urging him not to publish the book and outlining its dangers to the public (I signed the letter).

From the letter:

As a robust and comprehensive coalition of HIV/AIDS advocates, organizations, and public health experts, we are writing to you with an urgent concern. Simon & Schuster (by subsidiary Skyhorse) has plans to distribute a book called, *The Real AIDS Epidemic: How the Tragic HIV Mistake Threatens Us All* by recognized AIDS denialist Rebecca Culshaw on March 28, 2023. In the midst of coexisting pandemics and public health outbreaks, we know the dire and deadly consequences of spreading misinformation and denialism. It is disappointing that a book like Culshaw's is on a roster of your releases in 2023, but you still have a chance to reverse this decision. We are asking you to reconsider this book deal and stop its distribution...

Furthermore, research has shown that AIDS denialism poses real health risk to people living with HIV and their sexual partners. We know that patients who fall into AIDS denialism are more likely to experience HIV-related symptoms of illness and have higher, detectable viral loads, meaning the virus (which is real) can be

transmitted to their sexual partners. By releasing an AIDS denialist book, Simon & Schuster would be encouraging vulnerable people to ignore medical directions and to stop their medications, which is dangerous to their health and is likely to lead to a higher amount of virus in their bodies.

“The rights of freedom of speech are paramount,” [Jason Rosenberg](#), a member of ACT UP NY and one of the letter’s organizers, told me, “but when bad actors take advantage of that right and lead with science denialism and health misinformation—especially through the channels of a major publication, it is important that we fight it and deplatform these bad actors with every opportunity. We’ve seen it recently from the COVID-19 pandemic, and it is true with HIV/AIDS, racism, transphobia, fascism, and every public health threat.”

Shame, shame, on Simon & Schuster and their subsidiary Skyhorse Publishing for, at the least, not doing their homework, and at worst, willfully perpetuating dangerous messaging that runs counter to the facts.

It might be argued that the best plan of action would be to simply ignore the book and let it join the junkheap of similarly outrageous notions in HIV/AIDS history. But that runs counter to the very foundation of HIV activism.

We don’t ignore dangerous developments. We fight back.

Mark