Ronald Reagan and AIDS

December 21, 2011 By Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.

POZ cover boy Andrew Sullivan has posted another HIV-related video in his “Ask Me Anything” series on his blog, The Daily Dish. These videos give him an opportunity to personally respond to reader inquiries.

Previous HIV-related videos asked him "When did you find out you had HIV?“; ”Other than HIV drugs, what do you credit with your longevity with the virus?“; and ”How has your HIV status influenced your politics?"

In his current video, he’s asked: “What did you think of Reagan’s response to the AIDS crisis and what’s your view of him in general?” Sullivan is critical, but supportive.

Watch the video:

Here are excerpts from Sullivan:

"He failed on AIDS in many ways in terms of leading, in terms of naming this, and rallying the country to do something about it. And that remains, I think, a blight on his record ... But there’s a sort of Kushnerite view that Reagan killed us all, which is just usual Kushnerite crap. I mean, this is a man who wanted to inject the Rosenbergs into the AIDS crisis through that ridiculous play of his Angels in America. They wanted to believe

this was created by Reagan, that he was a Hitler and there was a Holocaust. No, he was the president and there was a plague, which nobody knew how to stop ... I don't think he can be held responsible for the deaths of people under that virus ...

"*I loved the man and I still have great fondness for him. I think he was a decent, civil, cheerful, optimistic and inspiring figure. And I don't take any of that back whatsoever. He did traffic in some of the aspects of the right that I think have become more concentrated and poisonous now, and he bears some responsibility for that. But he also basically restored this country's faith in itself at a moment when it was truly in serious in self doubt ... Remember, too, he was a Democrat before he became a Republican. I think that helped him form his ability to reach more people than the current crew of clowns and idiots.*"

I am a big fan of *Angels in America* (I can't stop watching whenever the HBO miniseries pops up on TV), so I can't relate to Sullivan's extreme distaste for it. However, I do understand his point that no one man can bear the blame alone for such a catastrophe as AIDS.

It's this line that really bothers me: "I don't think he can be held responsible for the deaths of

people under that virus.” Reagan did not himself physically transmit HIV to people, but I find it hard to believe that his lack of leadership did not contribute to those deaths.

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