



Shreveport Celebrates Its Mind-Boggling ACT UP History

June 30, 2026 By [Mark S. King](#)

The story is so unlikely, so heroic, so filled with tragedy and triumph, it deserves to be a movie or a book. And now it is both.

[Dr. David Hylan's](#) account of the history of ACT UP Shreveport was first chronicled in his [2017 documentary, *Small Town Rage*](#), which featured interviews with the surviving, plucky team of activists in the Louisiana city. During the height of the AIDS epidemic, they fought ignorance and fear while caring for their own members.

They changed policy, attitudes, and the HIV landscape throughout Louisiana.

And now, the book. [Small Town Rage: Fighting Back in the Deep South](#) has just been released, and it further details the protests, strategies, and internal struggles within a southern ACT UP chapter no one could have imagined.

Led by figures like Chuck Selber, Deborah Allen, Robert “Bobby” Darrow, Joe DeSantis, and others, ACT UP Shreveport’s defiance helped change the face of the Southern HIV/AIDS response and gave birth to The Philadelphia Center – one of Louisiana’s most vital HIV service organizations.

ACT UP Shreveport co-founder Deborah Allen

On Saturday, June 27, a book launch at Shreveport's Central Artstation facility brought together many of the ACT UP chapter's surviving members, along with nurses, doctors, and other allies who lived through the tumultuous period of city history. Many of them brought their children, so they could witness for themselves a piece of living history and get a sense of what their parents had accomplished. It was a triumphant class reunion.

I grew up in Shreveport but fled the moment I graduated high school in 1978 for the greener, more accepting pastures of larger cities like New Orleans and, eventually, Los Angeles. Once in West Hollywood, my life would be upended by the burgeoning AIDS pandemic.

Back home, those who never left – or had returned home to die only to find themselves battling HIV ignorance and fear – created one of the most remarkable and unlikely ACT UP chapters in the country.

Author Dr. David Hylan with writer of the foreward Mark S. King

In the foreward I was honored to write for Small Town Rage, I put it this way:

ACT UP Shreveport redefined a city. And in doing so, they redefined my own life. Now, when I return home to visit the extended family that fate has allowed me to come to know, I no longer view Shreveport with the mixture of regret and disdain I once did.

ACT UP made Shreveport a city of heroes, a city of enlightenment, and a city that can be bent to the will of honorable people...

The men and women of ACT UP Shreveport did something gutsier than I ever have. They stayed, or they returned home. And, against intimidating odds, they made it better.

You can purchase [Small Town Rage: Fighting Back in the Deep South](#) wherever books are sold online. I hope you do. You will be cheering them on, and they richly deserve it.

Mark

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