The AIDS Taliban

January 6, 2009 By Peter Staley

Following the inevitable death of AIDS denialist Christine Maggiore, which I blogged about last week, the Los Angeles Times ran an editorial on Saturday that's well worth reading.

They compare AIDS denialism to other notable anti-science movements in history, from the Catholic Church taking hundreds of years to acknowledge that the earth is round, to our equally blinded-by-religion contemporaries that reject the undeniable evidence of Darwin's theory (now proven) of evolution. Here's their money quote:

> In some instances, these debates are interesting but not terribly consequential. But sometimes they are of staggering significance. When the theory in question is about the cause of climate change or AIDS, misplaced skepticism, whether cynical or well-intentioned, can lead to grave results. For years, the South African government joined with Maggiore in denying that HIV is responsible for AIDS and resisting antiretroviral treatment. According to a new analysis by a group of Harvard public health researchers, 330,000 people died as a consequence of the government's denial and 35,000 babies were born with the disease.

I blogged about the Harvard study as well. I can't think of another anti-science movement that's caused this much death.

Like Maggiore, many of the denialists are HIV positive. And just like their anti-Galilean and anti-Darwinian comrades, they hold and proselytize their views with a religious fervor (see the comments section from my post last week). There is no reasoning with them. How can you reason with anyone that attempts to easily explain away the death of their three-year-old daughter, or the deaths of hundreds of thousands of South Africans?

They are our deadly religious fringe. They are our Taliban.

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