

AIDS denialism: the pseudoscience that kills

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**YERKES
NATIONAL
PRIMATE
RESEARCH
CENTER**



**GEORGIA
RESEARCH
ALLIANCE**

The Beginning of AIDS

- Gottlieb MS, et al. *Pneumocystis carinii* pneumonia and mucosal candidiasis in previously healthy homosexual men: evidence for a new acquired cellular immunodeficiency.
- Masur H, et al. An outbreak of community-acquired *Pneumocystis carinii* pneumonia: initial manifestation of cellular immune dysfunction.

NEJM, Volume 305, 1981



The NEW ENGLAND
JOURNAL of MEDICINE

The AIDS Quilt





On 9/11/2001 approximately 3,000 people died during the terror attacks, and approximately 8,000 people died of AIDS.

1981-2018: Thirty-seven years of AIDS

The glass half-full:

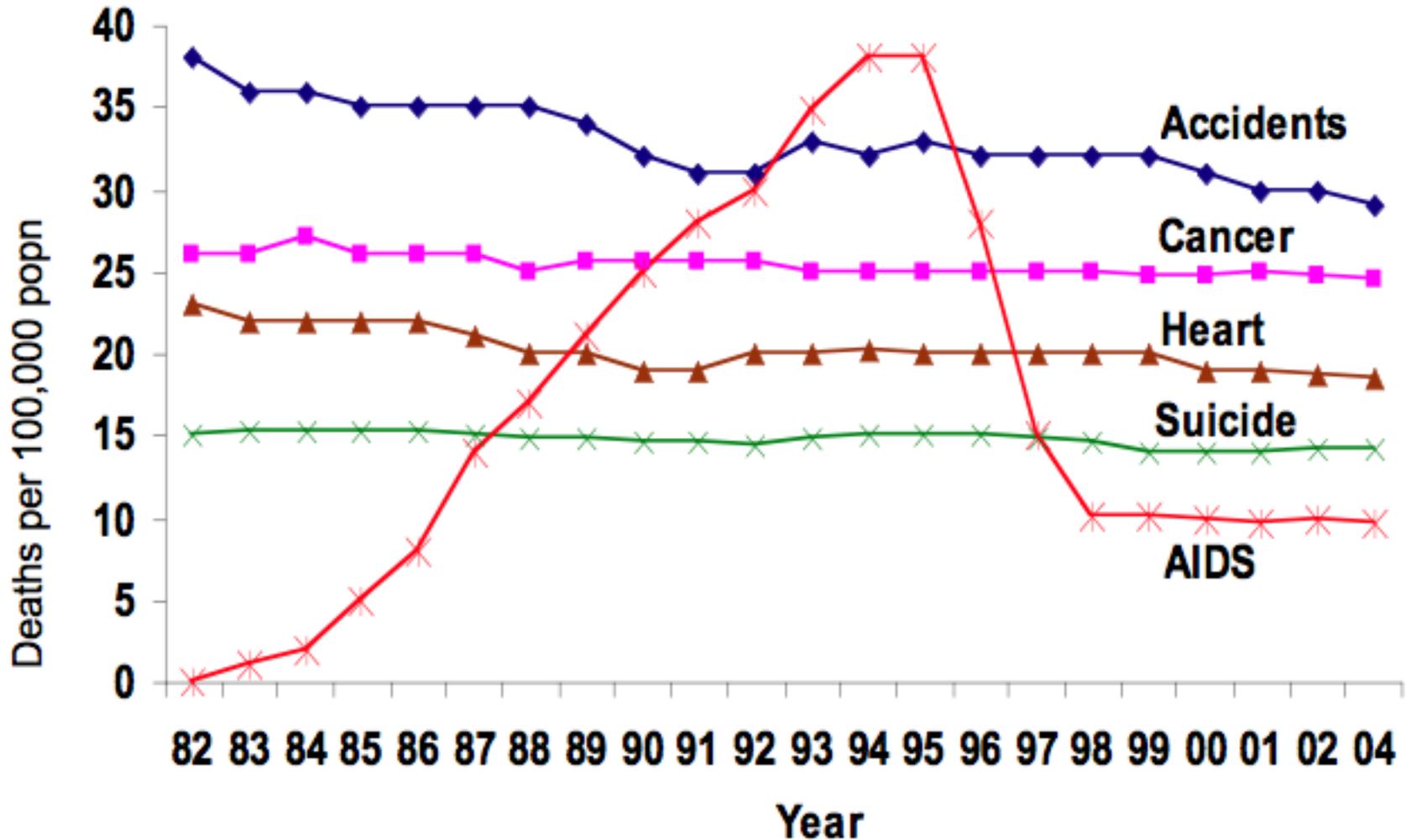
1. **Discovery and characterization of the etiologic agent.**
2. **Development of lab tests to monitor and prevent the infection.**
3. **Definition of the origin of the epidemics.**
4. **Development of ART, with major reduction in mortality and MTCT.**

The glass half-empty:

1. **Absence of a vaccine or a long lasting microbicide.**
2. **Absence of a treatment that can eradicate infection.**

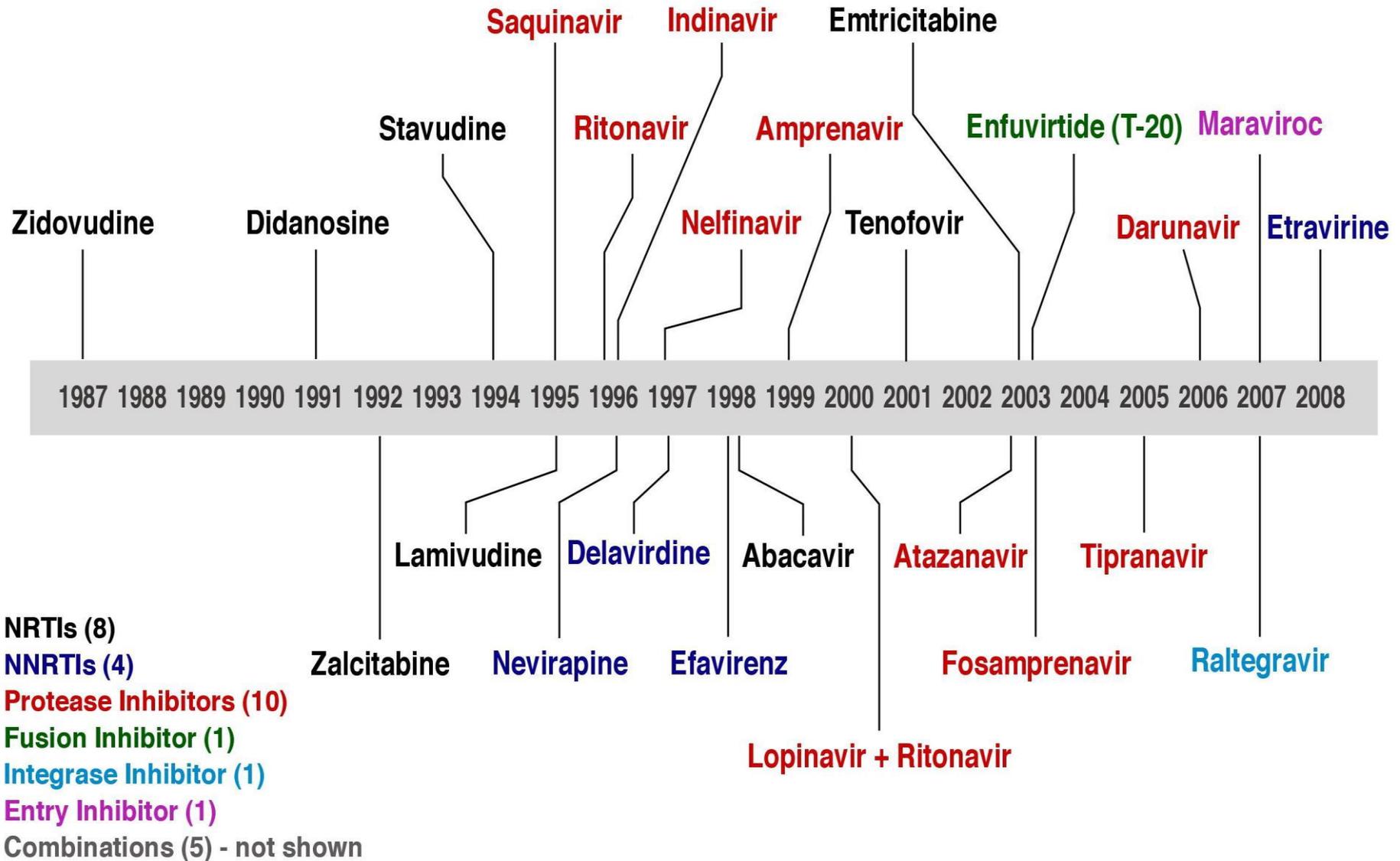
The rise and fall of HIV in the US - both sexes, aged 25-45

National Center for Health Statistics
National Vital Statistics System



RT is one of the most effective medical interventions in history

FDA-Approved Antiretrovirals



The Challenge of Implementation



The vast majority of HIV infections occur in low and middle income countries, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The **President's Emergency Plan For AIDS Relief (PEPFAR/Emergency Plan)** is a United States governmental initiative to address the global HIV/AIDS epidemic, primarily in Africa.

The \$39B program has provided since 2008 antiretroviral therapy to >7.7M HIV-infected people in resource-limited settings and supported HIV testing and counseling for >56M people.

PEPFAR has been called the largest health initiative ever initiated by one country to address a disease worldwide.

The tragedy of HIV/AIDS denialism in S. Africa during the presidency of Thabo Mbeki (1999-2008)-- who instituted policies denying ART to HIV-infected patients-- caused an estimated ~350,000 preventable deaths.



AIDS Denialism

AIDS denialists believe that HIV does not exist, and even if exists, it doesn't cause AIDS, and that AIDS is a non-infectious syndrome caused by either recreational drugs or anti-HIV drugs.

AIDS denialism is one of the most aberrant ideology ever conceived by the human mind – this is true in terms of its scientific, medical, cultural, logical, and ethical impact.

There is a significant overlap between the supporters of AIDS denialism and the supporters of anti-vaccine views.

The Pyramid of AIDS Denialism

Theorists (or Prophets of the Cult): those who generated the original idea, also known as “Hero Scientists” who fight the ‘scientific establishment’. Refer to Galileo.

The Propaganda machine (or Priests of the Cult): includes the “praise singers: and the “cultopreneurs”. Often there is a business involved and/or legal support.

The followers (or Faithful of the Cult): sometimes HIV-infected, “conspiracy theorists”, social media users, often showing signs of “crank magnetism”.

The genesis of a conspiracy theory

Why do people believe in scientific conspiracy theories and how do they spread?

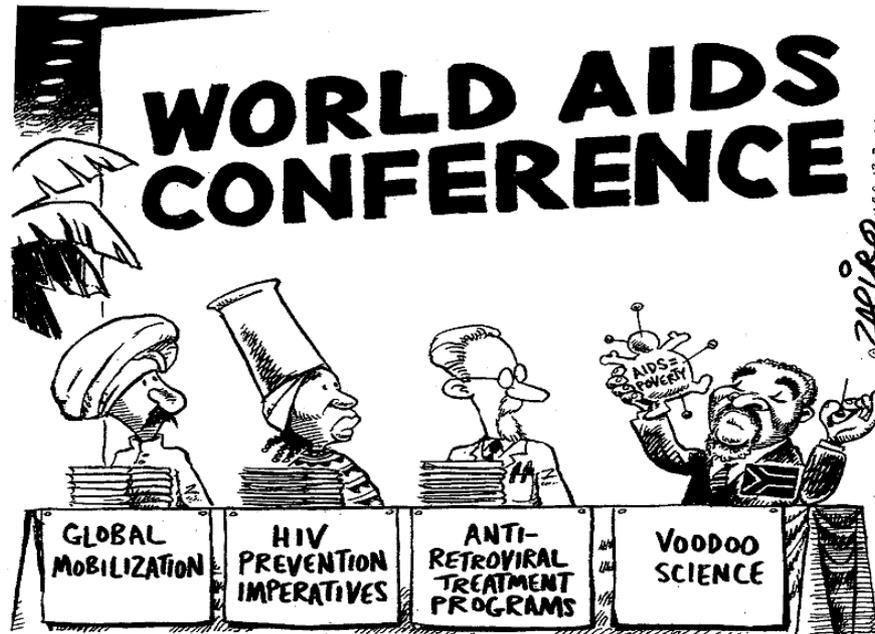
Katrin Weigmann

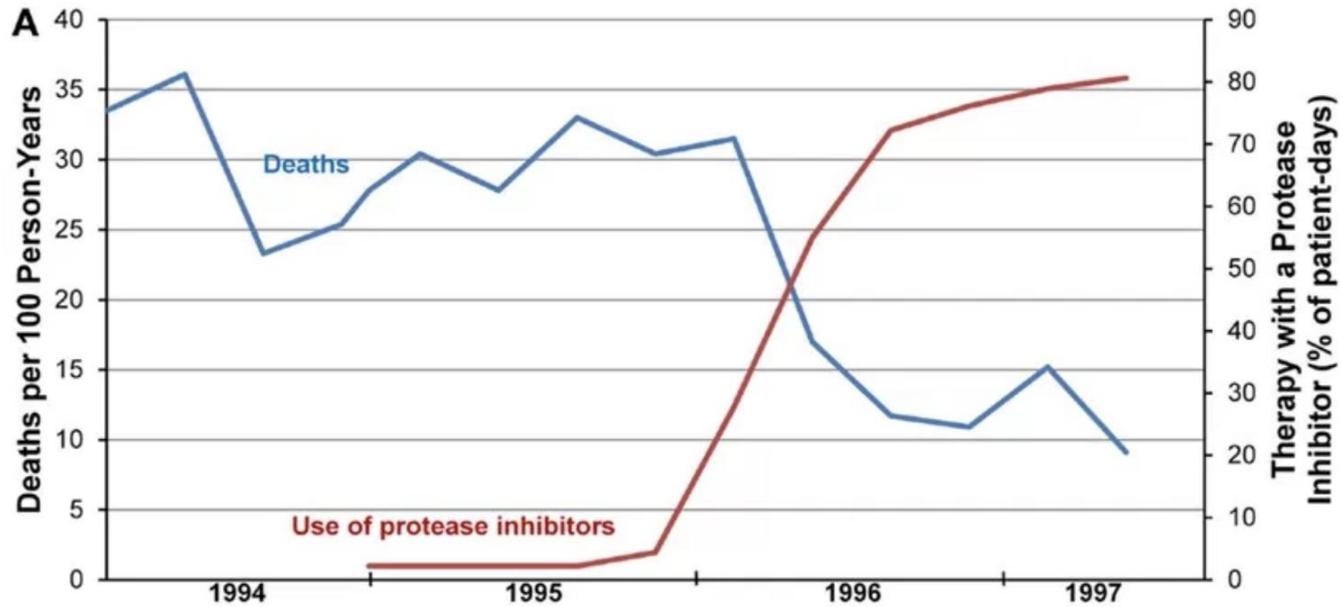
“In the face of uncertainty, conspiracy theories give simple and internally consistent explanations that meet people’s desire for predictability and definite conclusions.”

“Conspiracy theories can do considerable harm when they are embraced by political leaders.”

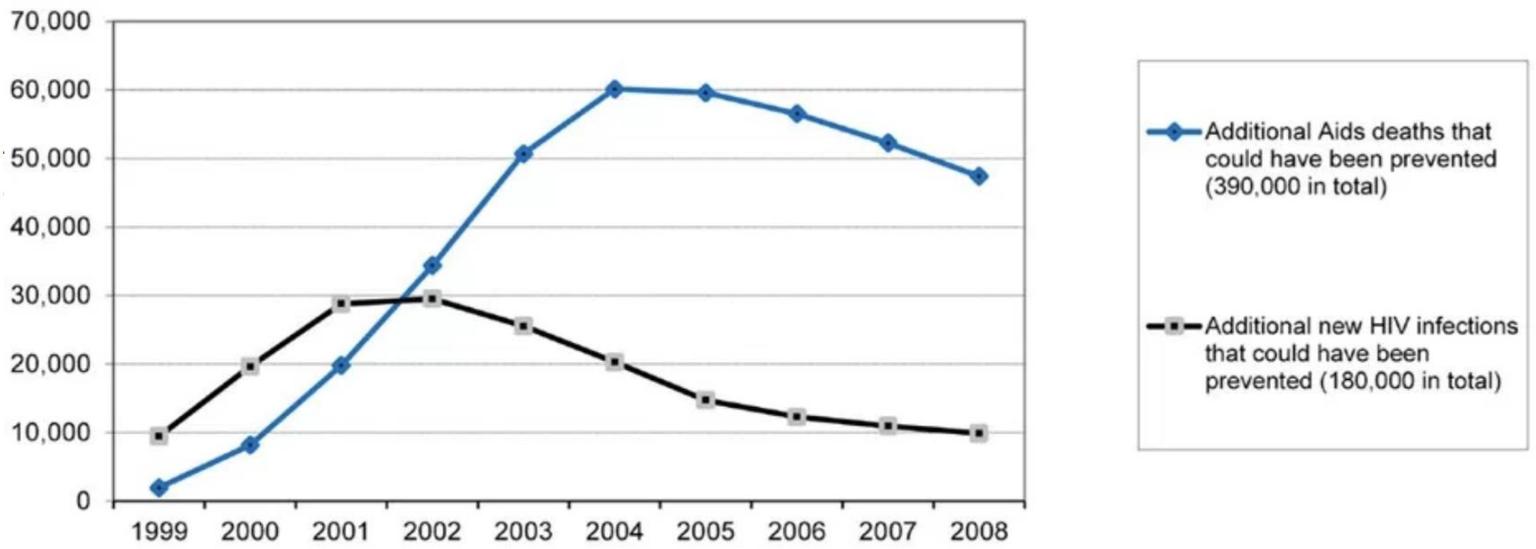
The Mbeki legacy

- In South Africa, where >5 million people live with HIV, the government refused until 2005 to fund antiretroviral treatment, citing questions about the effectiveness of the drugs that inhibit the replication of HIV, as well as the whole idea that HIV is the cause of AIDS.
- Researchers from the Harvard School of Public Health calculated that the South African government's delay in introducing ART between 2000-2005 caused >350,000 deaths in that country.





B The Human Cost of Mbeki's Presidency: Lives saved and HIV infections prevented if HAART had been rolled out nationally at the same rate as in the Western Cape Province and if a National MTCTP Program had been Introduced in 1999



Christine Maggiore



- ***“What should we call it? A suicide? What should we call it when a woman dies because she refuses to believe she has a treatable illness?”***
- ***And what should we call it when a woman lets her baby daughter die because she refuses to believe the baby has a treatable illness? A murder?”***
- **<https://respectfulinsolence.com/2008/12/30/hivaid-s-denialist-christine-maggiore-die/>**

AIDS Denialism in 2018

Why Are Gwyneth Paltrow and SXSW Promoting an AIDS Denialist?

“Holistic psychiatrist” Kelly Brogan, MD, questions whether HIV causes AIDS and whether vaccines are safe.

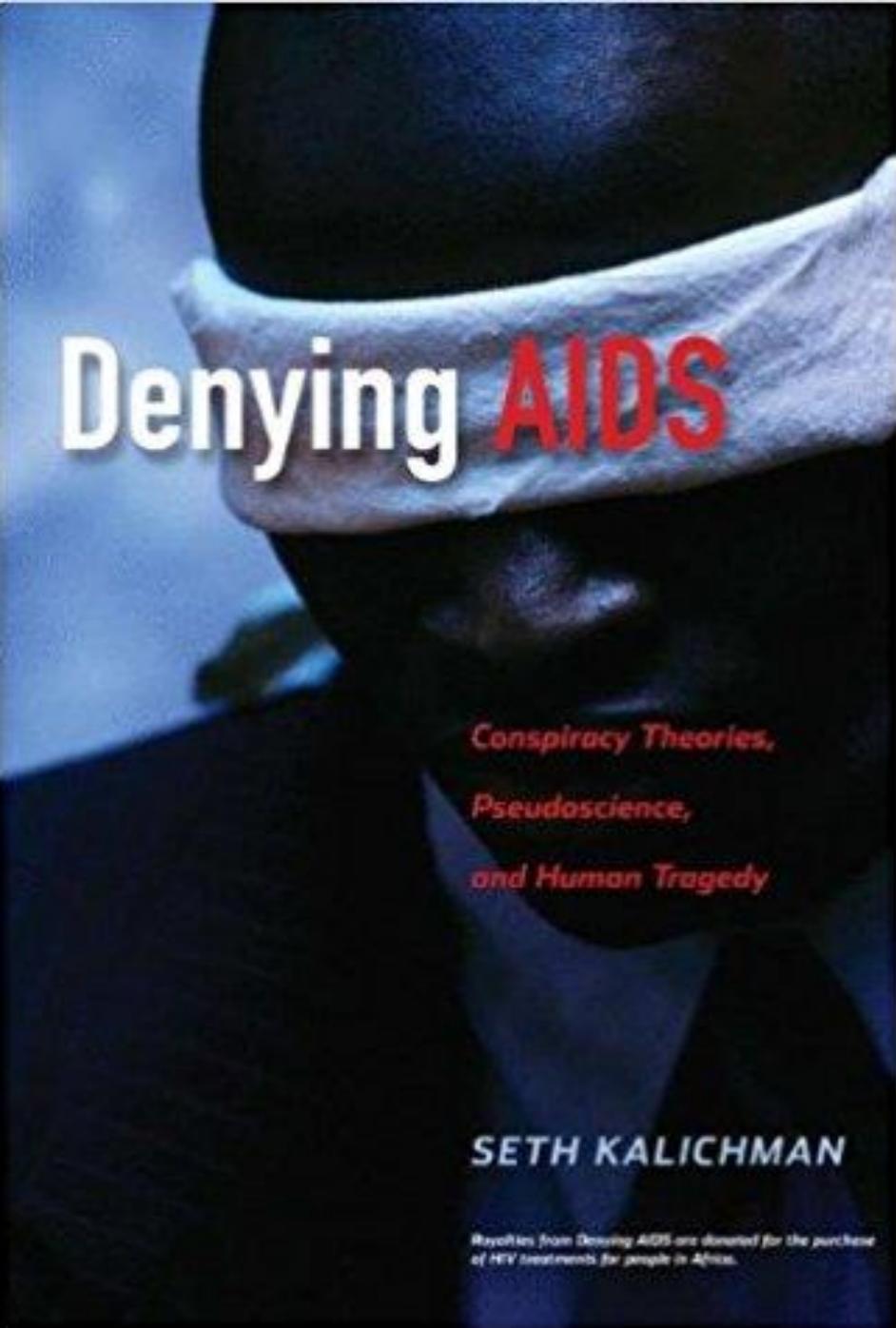
December 15, 2017

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World Aids Day: Russia stands on brink of unprecedented HIV crisis as thousands of victims deny it even exists

As the international community marks World Aids Day on 1 December, Oliver Carroll investigates the growing community of Russians who refuse to accept scientific facts about their disease

[Oliver Carroll](#) Moscow | [@olliecarroll](#) | Thursday 30 November 2017 18:01 GMT | 



Denying AIDS

*Conspiracy Theories,
Pseudoscience,
and Human Tragedy*

SETH KALICHMAN

Royalties from Denying AIDS are donated for the purchase of HIV treatments for people in Africa.

MORTAL COMBAT

AIDS Denialism and the Struggle
for Antiretrovirals in South Africa

NICOLI NATTRASS

