



# Global Nonviolent Action Database

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## ACT UP activists resist New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani's AIDS policies, 1994-95

3 January

1994

to: 25 April

1995

**Country:** United States

**Location City/State/Province:** *New York City*

**Location Description:** *most demonstrations took place at City Hall*

### Goals:

1. Prevent abolition of Department of AIDS Services
2. Resist budget cuts

## Methods

### Methods in 1st segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 034. Vigils › In addition to protests, AIDS activists held daily vigils at City Hall to remember victims lost to AIDS.
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

### Methods in 2nd segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support › Nonprofits that would take on the responsibility of DAS functions deluged the Giuliani administration in letters of protest about cuts to the division.
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 032. Taunting officials › When Giuliani conducted a town hall meeting, protesters shouted and threw fliers at him.
- 034. Vigils › In addition to protests, AIDS activists held daily vigils at City Hall to remember victims lost to AIDS.
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

### Methods in 3rd segment:

### Methods in 4th segment:

### Methods in 5th segment:

### Methods in 6th segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 172. Nonviolent obstruction

## Classifications

**Classification:**

Defense

**Cluster:**

Human Rights

**Group characterization:**

- AIDS activists

## Leaders, partners, allies, elites

**Leaders:**

AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP)

**Partners:**

New York Urban League, the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies and the United Jewish Appeal-Federation of Jewish Philanthropies, health advocacy groups, Housing Works, STAND UP Harlem

**External allies:**

The Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence, National Congress for Puerto Rican Rights, CUNY Coalition Against Cuts

**Involvement of social elites:**

Health Commissioner, Dr. Margaret A. Hamburg concerned that tuberculosis control efforts could be hampered if AIDS patients fall out of social safety net since AIDS victims are ten times more likely to develop infectious tuberculosis.

Actress Susan Sarandon and Rosie Perez

Marva L. Hammons, commissioner of the Human Resources Administration said, "But, no, I am not in favor of the total elimination of D.A.S."

## Joining/exiting order of social groups

**Groups in 1st Segment:**

- New York Urban League
- and other nonprofits that would have to take on responsibilities of DAS
- the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies and the United Jewish Appeal-Federation of Jewish Philanthropy

**Groups in 2nd Segment:**

**Groups in 3rd Segment:**

**Groups in 4th Segment:**

**Groups in 5th Segment:**

**Groups in 6th Segment:**

- CUNY Coalition Against Cuts
- National Congress for Puerto Rican Rights
- The Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence

**Segment Length:** 80 days

## Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

### **Opponents:**

Giuliani administration

### **Nonviolent responses of opponent:**

Formed barriers with police cars and created a solid phalanx of officers to block protesters' march.

Did not allow press conferences on the steps of City Hall because supposedly the demonstration groups of more than 20 people hindered access to the building.

### **Repressive Violence:**

High arrest numbers, protesters yanked from their seats, some protesters were zip-tied, dragged, and forcibly removed from the area on orange stretchers.

## Success Outcome

### **Success in achieving specific demands/goals:**

2 points out of 6 points

### **Survival:**

1 point out of 1 points

### **Growth:**

3 points out of 3 points

### **Notes on outcomes:**

Although ACT UP members and AIDS activists managed to prevent the complete abolition of the Department of AIDS Services, by the end of 1995, they could not totally prevent Giuliani's budget cuts which is why they received a score of 2 points for their success. The last demonstration was a coalition effort by all the groups affected by Giuliani's cuts.

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When Rudolph (Rudy) Giuliani took office as New York City's 107th Mayor on 1 January 1994, the city had a budget deficit of \$2.3 billion. The Republican candidate planned to close the city deficit by eliminating 15,000 city jobs. Police, firefighters, and teachers, which made up 60 percent of total city employees, were exempt from the job cuts. With these exemptions, the city administration had to find its staff reductions from less than 40 percent of its 216,000-strong work force. As a result, the Human Resources Administration (HRA), under which the Department of AIDS Services (DAS) existed, became a main target for job cuts due to its large size and heavy budget of \$7.4 billion.

The New York City Human Resources Administration created the Division of AIDS Services, later known as HIV/Aids Services Administration (HASA), in 1985 as New York found itself at the center of the AIDS epidemic. The 740-person agency assigned a caseworker to each patient to help the patients by putting together benefit packages, including Medicaid reimbursement, food stamps, welfare assistance, housing subsidies or shelter. In 1994, DAS served over 16,000 AIDS patients, a number projected to double by 1997. Despite this increased demand for the agency's services, talks within the Giuliani administration included severely cutting its \$22-million-a-year staffing budget if not eliminating the unit entirely. Because state and federal law did not require DAS to exist, the department was particularly vulnerable to complete dismantlement. Other proposals included keeping a smaller 100 to 300 person staff, who would evaluate patients, register them for benefits, and then rely on community-based organizations to address the rest of the patients' needs.

Giuliani's expected budget plan immediately worried AIDS activists, so on 3 January 1994, two days after he took office, the NY AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) rallied at City Hall to demand the Mayor make the AIDS crisis a priority of his administration. Because the Mayor's office was located inside City Hall, the Lower Manhattan building became somewhat of an epicenter of the campaign's demonstrations. In March, protesters gained access to the third floor of City Hall and hung a 30 foot

by 10 foot banner that ridiculed the building as the "AIDS Hall of Shame." ACT UP members repeated this method using a similar banner a few times afterwards. Each time, City Hall security removed the banner after five minutes, and no arrests were made.

Because Giuliani's proposed plan threatened the budgets of a wide range of government services, such as education, healthcare, and youth programs, various groups congregated at City Hall to protest the budget cuts. On 22 March 1994, ACT UP/NY, joined by Housing Works and Stand Up Harlem, gathered over 1,000 demonstrators at Brooklyn's Cadman Plaza for a march across the Brooklyn Bridge to demand the preservation of the Department of AIDS Services. When the march reached the bridge entrance, the protesters, who were diverse in gender, race, and sexual orientation, encountered a brief standoff with the police. On the roadway, the police created a barricade with cars and formed a solid phalanx. Most participants retreated and used the walkways, though many continued on the roadway. Those that remained approached the police lines in waves, then seated themselves in the middle of the road. After one wave was zip tied and dragged away, the next wave walked forward, sat down, and replaced them. This continued until, ultimately, police arrested 45 people and charged them with disorderly conduct. This demonstration succeeded in blocking traffic due to the police presence on the bridge.

On 11 April 1994, Rudy Giuliani conducted a 90-minute town hall meeting at Junior High School 56 in the Lower East Side. Over 100 discontented participants from two different protest groups demonstrated outside the school. One group protested the Board of Community School District 1's decision not to renew the contract of its superintendent, William E. Ubina while the other protest group, consisting of 50 ACT UP members, protested the abolition of DAS. The raucous protesters heckled the Mayor and shouted slogans, such as "AIDS cuts equal death. Rudy, this means war." The protesters yelled and threw fliers as the Mayor tried to respond to questions, disrupting the town hall meeting.

The next day, 12 April, protesters, again from a variety of issue groups, gathered on the steps of City Hall to conduct what they considered routine press conferences. However, security officials denied protesters access to the building. Officials turned away two groups: the first represented four parents' advocacy organizations while the other group was comprised of AIDS advocates and included the actresses Susan Sarandon and Rosie Perez. A commanding officer determined that the groups came to demonstrate rather than conduct a news conference and relegated the two groups' press conferences to the sidewalk. He noted that groups of protesters larger than 20 made the building difficult to access and stated that groups of this size were not allowed to protest on the steps. This drew criticism from a number of community members. Norman Siegel, executive director of the New York Civil Liberties Union, said "The steps of City Hall have become a public forum. It seems unconstitutional to prohibit press conferences on the steps." Ronnie M. Eldridge, a Councilwoman from Manhattan echoed similar thoughts, "Never have I seen the repressive kind of techniques that we have seen here recently. We can't start limiting who can come in here. That is not democracy." Giuliani stated he had no role in the decision to ban demonstrations on the City Hall steps.

The day took a turn when two dozen protesters locked arms and attempted to block a hallway yards away from the Mayor's office. The demonstrators chanted: "People with AIDS are under attack, what do we do?" Thirty to forty security officials participated in arresting the protestors; some protesters simply stood to be handcuffed and walked themselves out while other protesters resisted before security officials grabbed, cuffed, placed them on orange stretchers, and forcibly removed them from the building.

On 10 May, Mayor Giuliani released his proposed \$31.6 billion budget plan for the city. The plan left the Department of AIDS Services intact, but it would limit the number of caseloads to save \$350,000. Giuliani left the DAS seemingly untouched, but the official plan had not yet been released. In response to Giuliani's executive budget, ACT UP members returned to City Hall and hung a banner that read: "DAS is not enough, Rudy. Fight AIDS now!" Police arrested 18 protesters.

After Giuliani released the budget plan, protests specific to DAS funding subsided for the next year. However, on the evening of 25 April 1995, AIDS activists joined over 2,000 protesters and participated in a mass demonstration called "Shut the City Down!" This demonstration was the campaign's largest and resulted as a coalition effort of the various constituencies affected by Giuliani's policies. These groups included students and professors from the CUNY schools, the homeless, health care workers, AIDS activists, the disabled, and families of people killed by the police. Around 30 groups were involved in the

planning, including ACT UP, the Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence, the National Congress for Puerto Rican Rights and the CUNY Coalition Against Cuts.

The demonstration began with four separate rallies, each centering on different issues. Planned obstructions at four different sites followed the rallies. At Battery Tunnel, 50 protesters, mostly students, barricaded an entrance to the ramp and unraveled a banner that read: "Stop for Peaceful Protest." Meanwhile, on the Manhattan Bridge, two dozen demonstrators who wore signs on their stomachs that called for the end of police brutality, locked arms and refused to move from the bridge entrance. Downtown at the Brooklyn Bridge, two dozen homeless people and homeless advocates stood on the bridge for 20 minutes holding a banner that read: "The City is Ours." The biggest demonstration of the four took place at the Midtown Tunnel.

AIDS activists and health services and disability supporters began their rally at Bellevue Hospital and at around 5:30 PM converged towards the Midtown Tunnel. About 75 protesters shut down all six lanes that fed into the tunnel entrance. The President and CEO of Housing Works, Charles King, helped coordinate the die-in so that people with disabilities could use their bodies out of their wheelchairs as physical barriers to the bridge. This caused a road gridlock during which traffic stalled for six blocks. For all four demonstrations, police arrived within 15 minutes and began arrests. Most arrests took place at the Midtown Tunnel, where police ordered a city bus be emptied to tow away 75 arrested participants. In all, the demonstration's arrest count totaled 185 people.

Although ACT UP members and AIDS activists managed to prevent the complete abolition of the Department of AIDS Services, by the end of 1995, they could not totally prevent Giuliani's budget cuts. The AIDS agency suffered a cut of \$3.1 million and was re-organized to tighten the scope of services the city offers its AIDS patients. The administration also toughened its criteria for those who could receive benefit packages.

## Research Notes

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