

**Weekly Writing Assignment #13:
Explaining Disease: The More Things Change, the More They Stay the Same?**

-- Due in Section, week of 12/06-12/08--

The readings this week provide several perspectives on HIV/AIDS. Treichler's essay, published in 1987, appeared at a time when AIDS was a lethal, untreatable disease. It had only been described in 1981. HIV was discovered in a complicated way between 1983 and 1985. A screening test had just become available. As she shows, this was a time of immense victim blaming, with the discourse on AIDS emphasizing deviance and exoticism. Many claims were asserted as scientific truth (e.g. the rugged vagina vs. the vulnerable rectum), despite the absence of any evidence. The stigma and blaming conspired to undermine disease research, prevention, and treatment.

Specter's article, published May 2005, is the product of a very different era. HIV and AIDS are better understood than any virus and disease in the history of medicine. Powerful treatments can completely stop viral replication, restoring patients to nearly perfect health (except for a series of problematic drug side effects...). Much of the terror that characterized AIDS in the 1980s has vanished. And yet...

What would Paula Treichler say to Michael Specter? Is his article an appropriate attempt to warn people about dangerous behaviors, or is he contributing to the epidemic of signification? Does his emphasis on libido, disinhibition, drug use, and reckless sexuality simply resurrect the discourses from the 1980s that Treichler critiqued?

Keep your answer short (200 words). There are many possible answers to these questions. Feel free to pick and defend one, or to provide several different ones. When you mention specific material from the texts or use quotations, provide adequate citations (author, page number).