

INTERPRETATION 2023

WELLCOME COLLECTION

GROUP A

conquer
AIDS

build
future

ols of the trade,
condoms & lube
Gay Men Fighting AIDS

crucial,
e'em with lube

the safest weapons,
condoms & lube
Gay Men Fighting AIDS



At the Revolution Revolution

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THE RUBBER REVOLUTION SAFE SEX MARKETING IN THE AIDS EPIDEMIC

The history of sex education has often been fraught. Learning resources often balance information with implicit messages about appropriate sexual behaviour. These issues reached new heights during the AIDS epidemic. As the disease spread widely, health authorities still lacked knowledge of how to treat its deadly symptoms, and ensuring the public practised safe sex became highly important.

The task of educating people about safe sex was embraced within the gay community. The posters displayed here have a strong voice that is distinctly opposed to official government material. Instead, the creators of these campaigns opted for humour, raunchy imagery and an emphasis on sexual pleasure.

This exhibition aims to reveal an alternative history of the AIDS epidemic. Within this period of suffering, there was still joyful erotic material to be found.

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RESOURCES FOR GAY MEN BY GAY MEN

In stark contrast to the official marketing promoted by government agencies, organizations such as Gay Men Fighting AIDS (GFMA) took an approach to marketing safe sex that was often funny and used imagery particular to fashion and beauty trends in gay culture at the time. Take a look at the builders and sailors in the posters. Strong, masculine, and youthful, these professions are displayed to convey the attractiveness of practicing safe sex.

Rather than relying on dark themes to convince people to use condoms, these posters depict men smiling, kissing, and partying. Safe sex isn't scary and it certainly isn't boring!

Polari

In this section of the exhibition, you'll spot some interesting words that might be new to you.

This slang comes from a secret language called Polari. Polari was used within queer communities, particularly amongst gay men, in the early twentieth century. It used elements of Italian, Romany and even criminal slang. It was essential that gay men keep their relationships private before homosexuality was partially decriminalised in 1967.

Although Polari had fallen out of fashion by the 1970s, some words remain popular. Here are some definitions that'll come in handy!

CRACK THE CODE

Polari

omi palones

men

Aunt Nell

Listen !

barney

fight

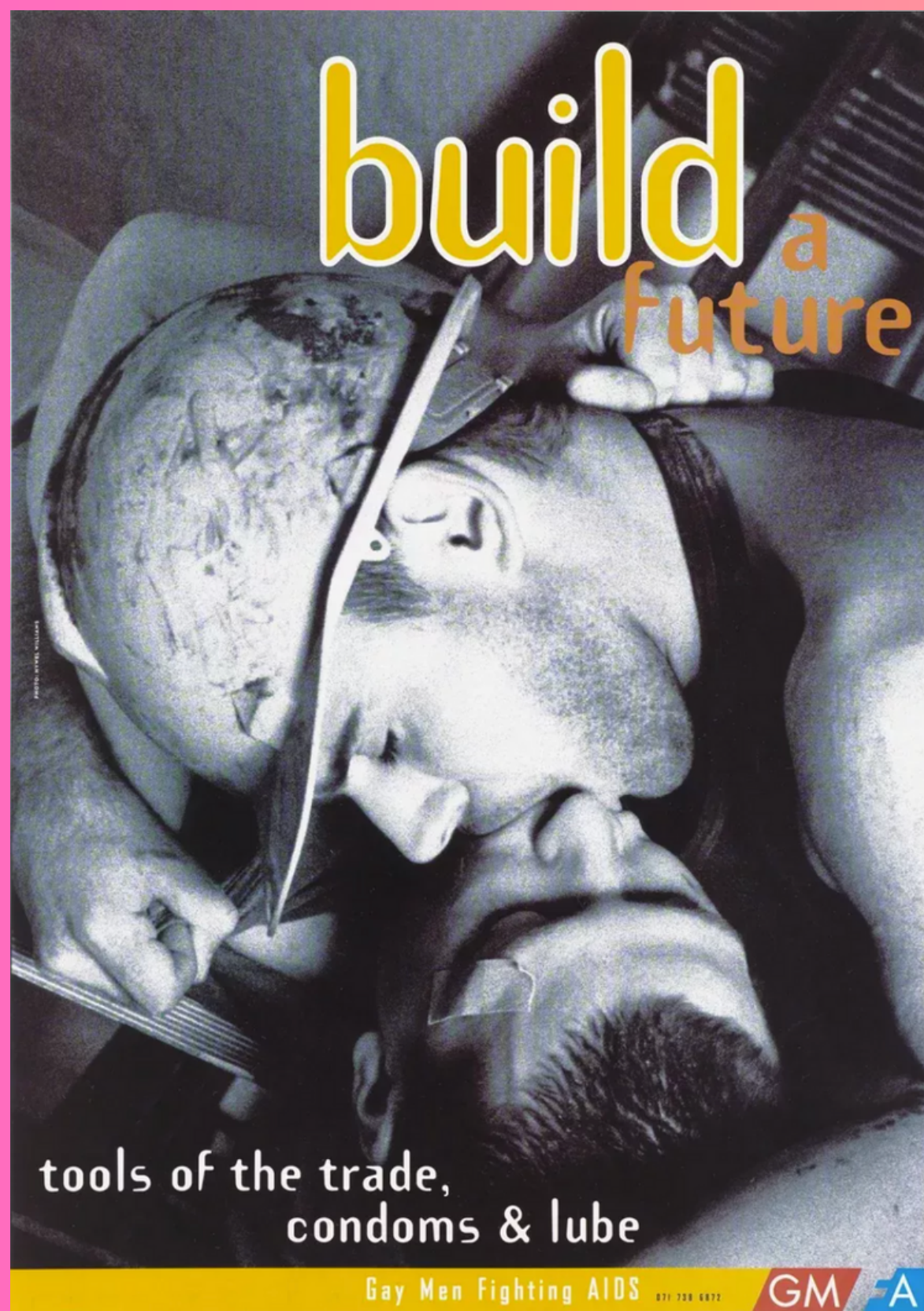
trade

attractive men

cruise

scout out potential
casual partners for
sexual relationships

object 1



This advert, depicting two **omi PALONES** labouring gives us some **LOVA** advice--use a condom, use some lube when out **for AdE**. They are, in fact, the tools of the **trAdE**.

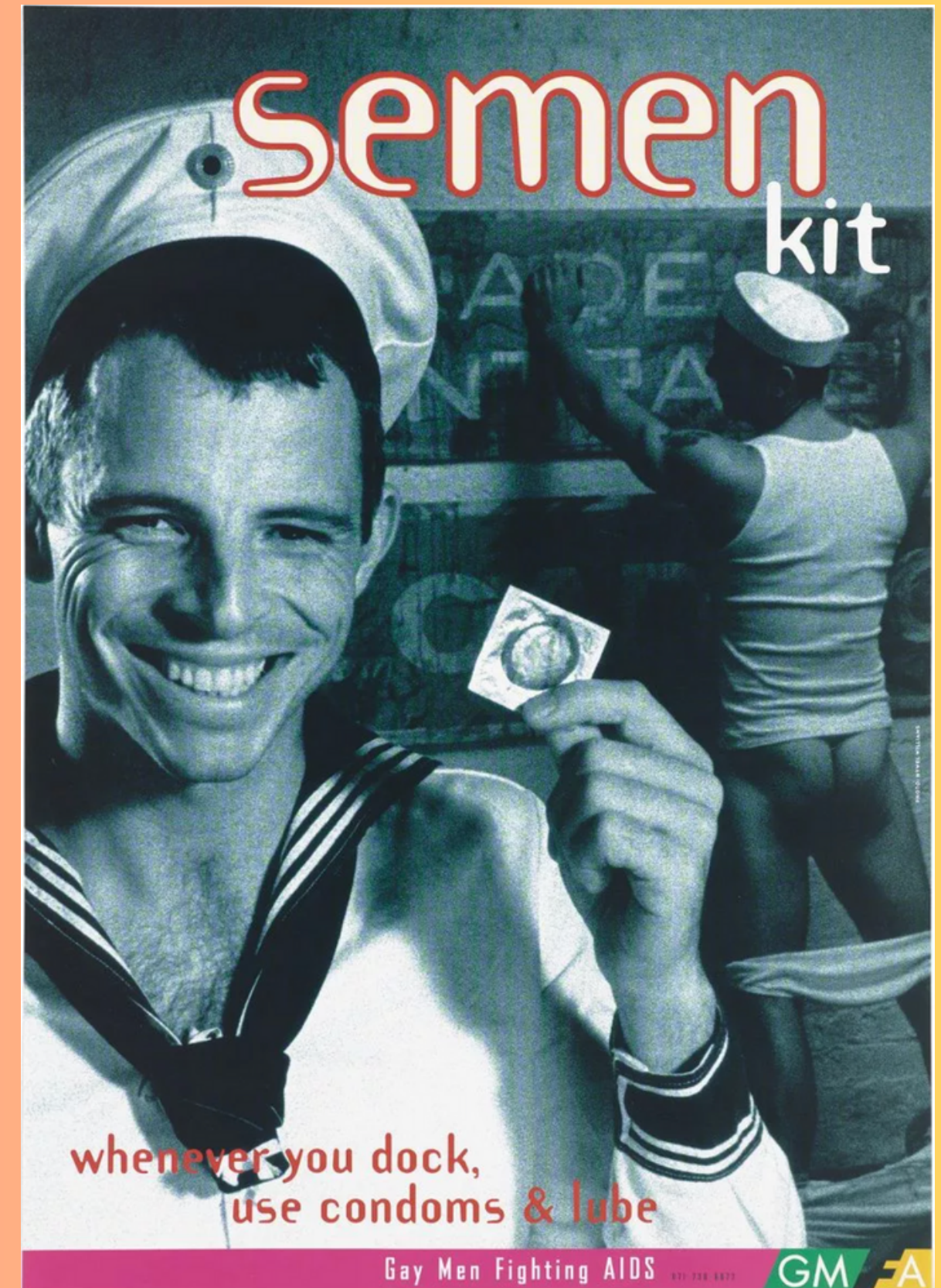
Hywel Williams Gay Men Fighting AIDS 199- Gay Men Fighting AIDS includes telephone number UK 15/07/2008 UkLW Transcription from the item

HELLOOOO SAILOR!

This poster from Gay Men Fighting Aids is a cheeky reminder to stay safe, no matter where you **Cruise**. An irreverent approach like this, produced for gay men by gay men, made condom use feel less like a politically fraught taboo. After all, who wouldn't glove up for a dish like this?

[Hywel Williams Gay Men Fighting AIDS 199- Gay Men Fighting AIDS includes telephone number UK 15/07/2008 UkLW Transcription from the item

object 2

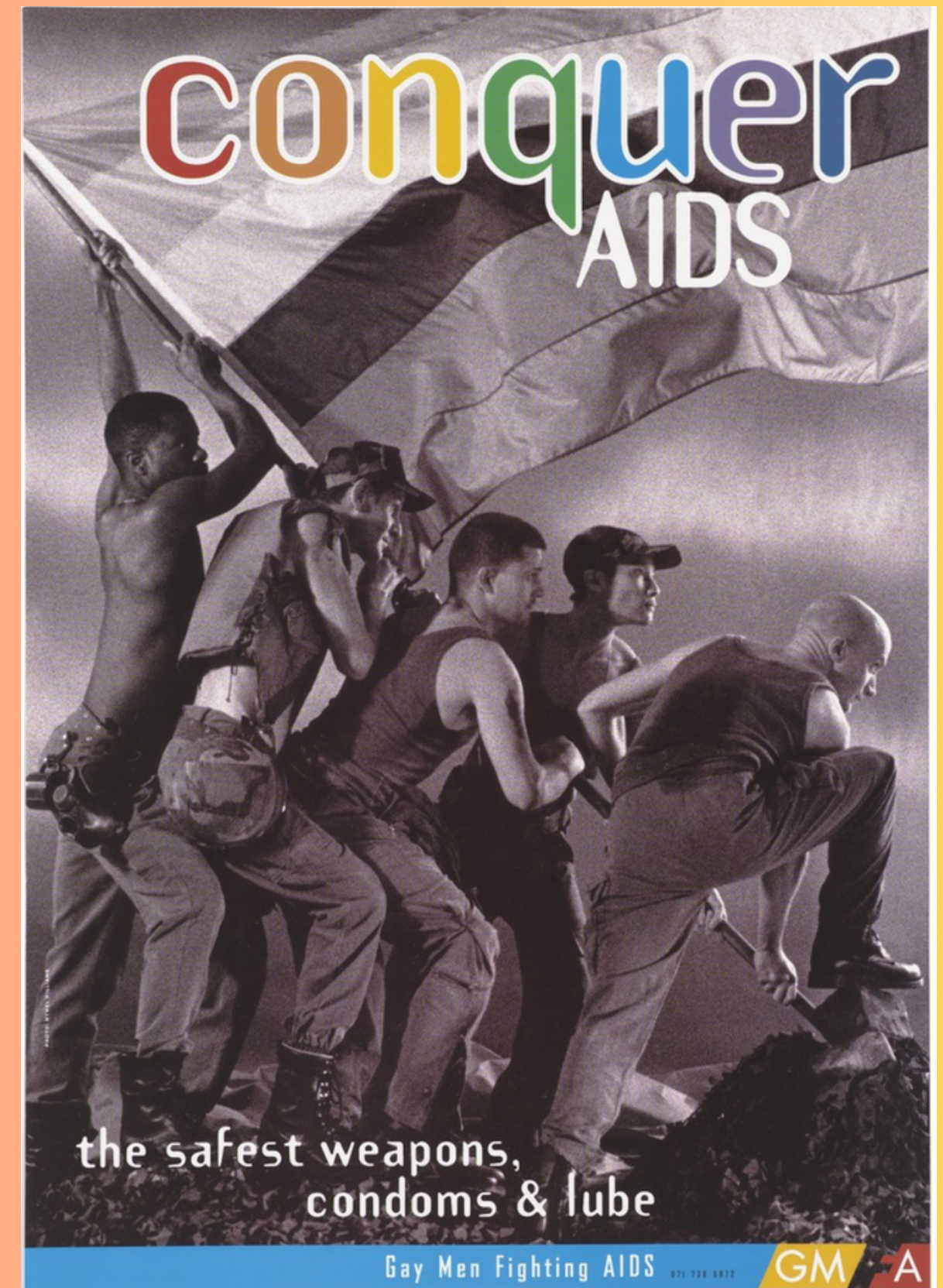


WAGE THE WAR ON AIDS!

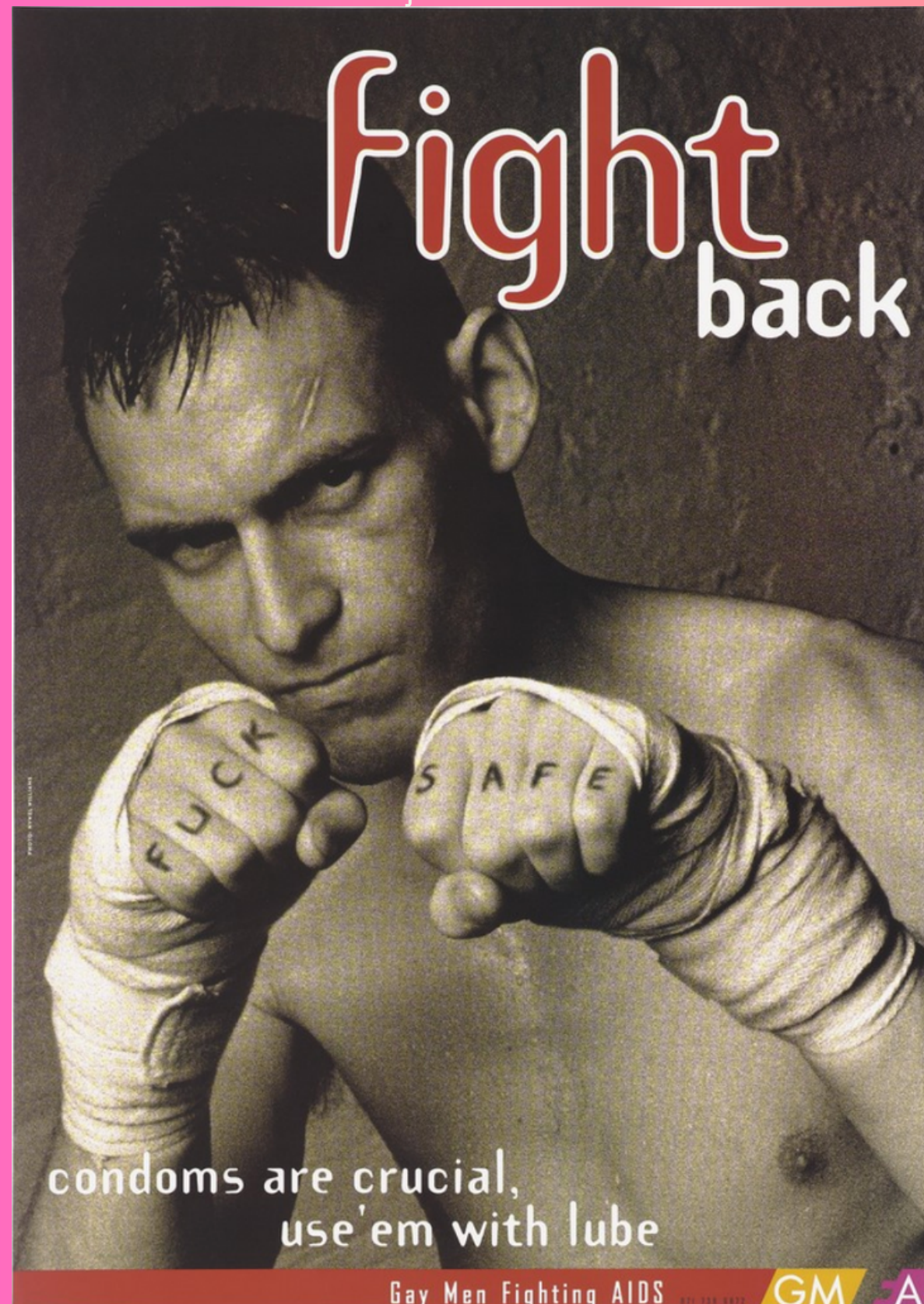
Five men work to plant the pride flag into the ground, as though they were soldiers. The image emphasises the strength it takes to conquer AIDS and tells us that it's possible when we get behind one another in solidarity.

aunt **NEEL** Anything is possible!

object 3



object 4



RATHER THAN FEARING IT, FIGHT IT!

This tough omi palone reminds us we've got what it takes to fight back. The boxer's raised fists are indicative of the stance the gay community took against AIDS, as well as the attitude organisations like GFMA took when promoting safe sex practices. Condoms and lube pack a punch in the **Barney** against AIDS.

Fight back : condoms are crucial, use 'em with lube / Gay Men Fighting AIDS ; photo: Hywell Williams. Source: [Wellcome Collection](#).

During the 1980s, nations recognised AIDS as a public health emergency. Governments around the world took action to spread awareness and information about the disease. The tone and imagery used are striking when compared to marketing materials created by the gay community. Rather than using language and imagery popular in the gay community, official marketing often used fear to convey their message. Perhaps the most well-known marketing in the UK appeared on television, titled ‘Don’t Die of Ignorance’ is displayed here along with pamphlets that the government distributed alongside it.



OFFICIAL GOVERNMENT MARKETING (DURING THE 1980S)



AIDS: MONOLITH (1987)



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iroty5zwOVw>

This 1987 PSA was for many people a key symbol of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the UK. Directed by Nicolas Roeg, it utilises the visual language of horror films to convey the fatal dangers of the disease. Here, the government seeks to scare people into practising safe sex.

Interestingly, the voiceover you can hear is by John Hurt, an actor known for playing a gay icon, the famous raconteur Quentin Crisp.

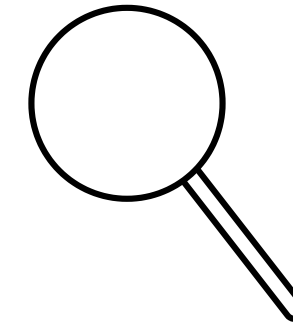


DEVELOPMENTS IN HIV/AIDS SERVICES (POST-1980S)

Sexual health services and communication have come a long way since the onset of AIDS. Free services such as STI (sexual transmitted infection) testing, health counseling, and medication provide people with the tools to keep themselves healthy. Because of these advances, conversations about HIV have shifted from having an alarmist tone to a supportive one. Assisting people who are at risk of contracting or spreading HIV and reducing the stigma around having HIV or having a partner who is HIV positive are important topics today.

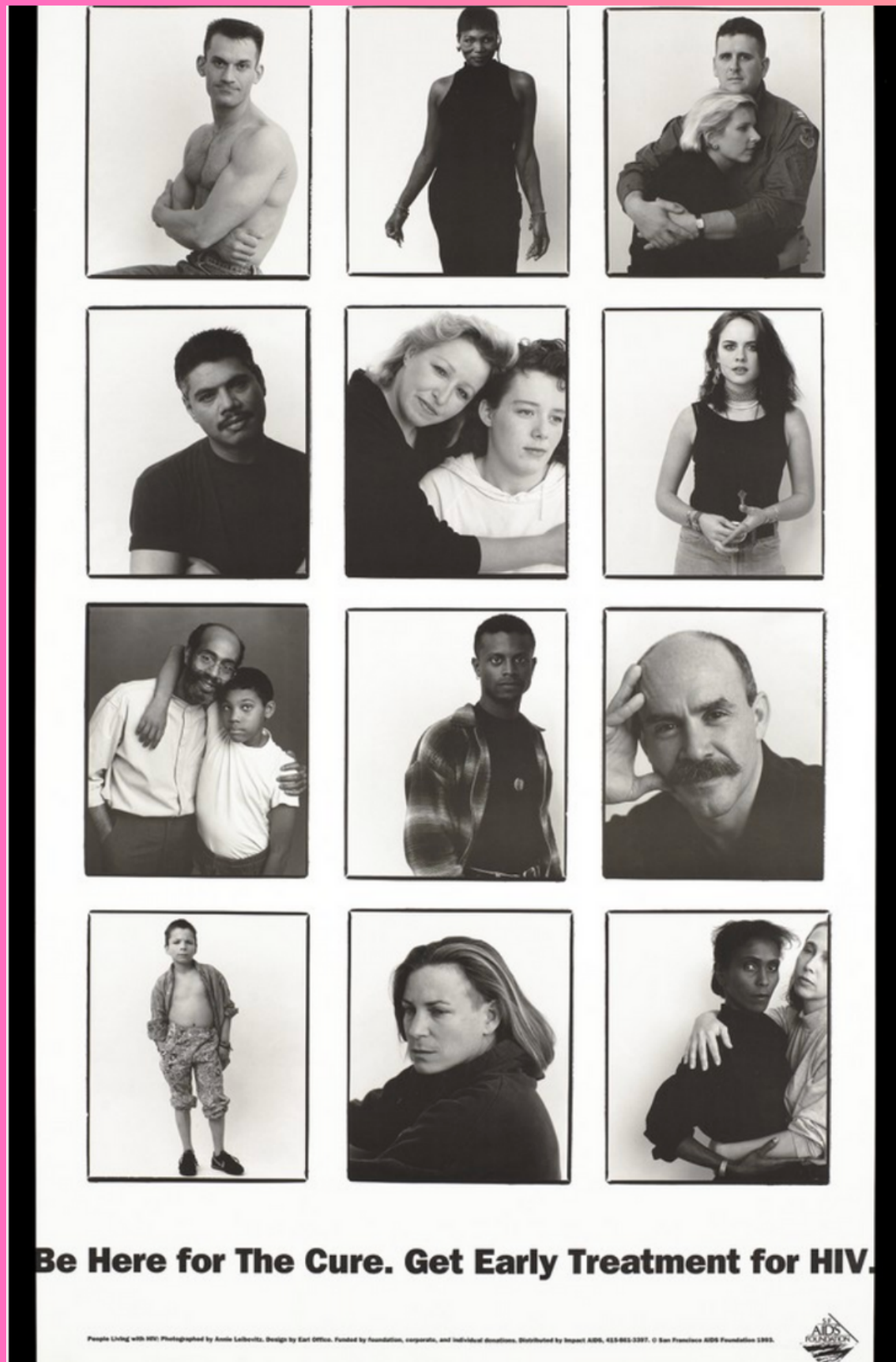
FIRST TV AD ON HIV SINCE 'TOMBSTONES' 40 YEARS AGO SET TO TACKLE ATTITUDES STUCK IN THE 1980S

<https://www.tht.org.uk/news/first-tv-ad-hiv-tombstones-40-years-ago-set-tackle-attitudes-stuck-1980s#:~:text=In%201987%20the%20advert's%20message,life%20just%20like%20anyone%20else>



This TV advert that aired in October conveys health officials' changing attitudes and priorities about AIDS and HIV. Instead of death and doom, this advert focuses on fighting stigmas and false information that persist today, even after being debunked.

object 5



These moving images by the famed photographer, Annie Leibovitz, are a hopeful advertisement for the HIV treatments that emerged in the early 1990s. Here, we see that survival has become a possibility. Notice how this poster also sensitively acknowledges that a variety of demographics may be affected by HIV.

Twelve photographs of people living with HIV representing an advertisement for early treatment of HIV by the San Francisco AIDS Foundation. Lithograph after Annie Leibovitz, 1993. Source: [Wellcome Collection](#).

object 6

The red AIDS ribbon was created by the Visual AIDS Artists Caucus in 1991, as a way to show solidarity with HIV positive people worldwide. Celebrities played an important role in popularising this symbol. Elizabeth Taylor wore it during her fundraising efforts for AIDS research, and the performers at the 1992 Freddie Mercury Tribute Concert sported the ribbon to commemorate the lives lost during the epidemic.



object 7

This advertisement highlights that pleasure-focused advertising for safe sex was embraced by many marginalised communities. The Black HIV/AIDS network mobilised to address the lack of inclusivity in sexual health resources for people from minority ethnic groups. This poster in particular advertises the femidom, a new form of contraception which provided protection during oral sex performed on vaginas.



An Asian couple embrace by a window; advertisement for the new female condom by the Black HIV/AIDS Network. Brown lithograph. Source: [Wellcome Collection](#).



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