

Plight of fighter urges all to battle

Another year and another World Class Athlete finds himself in the national spotlight, having tested positive for HIV. Boxer Tommy Morrison revealed that very private information to the public last week, ironically, just on the heels of Magic Johnson's return to basketball.

The announcement by Morrison's manager took me back to last school year and a similar disclosure by Olympic diving champion, Greg Louganis. And to an article I read in this newspaper, on these very pages, by then-Opinion Editor Scott Gulbransen.

Little did I know at that time that I would find myself in his position, in his shoes one year later, asking myself what reactions I felt to the likelihood that yet another human being would sooner or later succumb to the devastating effects of AIDS. I had to ask myself how best and most responsibly to share those reactions with readers of *The Rebel Yell*.

One thing I knew immediately: that the students of UNLV would not suffer another insensitive, judgmental diatribe 'Straight from the Gully,' pontificating the narrow view that death by AIDS is a 'lifestyle choice,' tantamount to suicide.

Let's be clear: The ranks of the infected and afflicted are made up of victims, not volunteers.

Since childhood we've all known the importance of heroes. That Tommy Morrison and Greg Louganis and Magic Johnson are athletes enjoying world-wide notoriety is only relevant to the exposure that they and their unfolding battle with the virus can focus on the calamity of AIDS. These are heroes like none before,

for a generation witnessing a pestilence like no other.

That these men may bravely fight, or not; one day probably losing that struggle only to be lowered into cold ground, like us all, serves to focus Mike and Carol America's attention on the humanity affected by the epidemic. Until AIDS is

conquered that focus must not shift. Yes, we all get tired of hearing about AIDS. It's been in the news far too long now. But too many friends, neighbors, loved ones, have been slowly ravaged far too long.

We don't want anymore escalating numbers of victims of both sexes, all age groups, every persuasion, assailing us daily in every form of media. Easier to bury our heads in the sand, pretending it doesn't happen, or, if it does, only to someone else.

And we weary of mustering hope to endless reports and promises of new drugs, new treatments, possible cures looming on the horizon in "three to five years." As people died, we've hoped and despaired almost three times five.

Where is the money for true, aggressive research? Where do we find a solid commitment to the eradication of HIV?

Possibly, we must find the impetus for solution in ourselves. AIDS will not just go away.

As much as governmental spendthrifts would like it to, and like you to believe that it might, somehow, take care of itself, AIDS will not simply disappear taking all I.V. drug

addicts and the entire queer nation with it. This is not another variation on the theme of natural selection, but a human tragedy on a global scale.

Neither is it any longer something that "happens to somebody else." Mike and Carol, we have heroes dying now. Children.

Mothers. Lifelong friends. Averting our gaze from the spectacle of death playing now on all sides only serves the disease. Those pointing ignorant fingers at others speed its advance in every population. By failing to arm our children with accurate information about HIV, we doom them needlessly to it. Yet we turn our eyes, pointing fingers, failing, consigning our neighbors and children to suffering far into miserable futures.

I know that I will not be able to avoid seeing and feeling the death of my daughter or brother or lover, or escape the pangs of longing for those who could have been saved with facts and condoms and quality, targeted research. Will you?

Aware of it or not, you know and care about someone now



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who carries the time bomb of HIV. How will you avoid them as they waste into the past?

And who among you, now dying, need the compassion and understanding of family, or of a friend grown chilly with hatred or fear? Which of you placed trust in a government that took 10 years to simply admit there was a crisis?

Feel the outrage of those thousands who died lingering deaths in that decade of denial.

Mike and Carol, know that Peter and Cindy are infected

today because you failed them yesterday. Embrace them now to ease their passing.

And know, too, that only by now embracing AIDS, hugging it tightly to yourselves; acknowledging its reality and its heroes and its affects in your lives, taking to yourselves the responsibility of saying to the President and Congress "Enough! Do you hear us? Enough!" will you ever see its end.

S.T. Sutherland is the Opinion editor of *The Rebel Yell*.

Origins of African-American History Month

Negro History Week was introduced in 1926 by Carter G. Woodson. Dr. Woodson, known as the father of Black History Study, was born in 1875 in New Canton, Virginia. He received his education at Berea College in Kentucky, the University of Chicago, Harvard, and the Sorbonne in Paris.

In 1915 Carter Woodson founded and became the director of the *Association for the Study of Negro life and History*. He introduced Negro History Week in 1926 as a reaction to American racism and to highlight the role of African Americans in the development of civilization.

The 1920's were anything but the "gay twenties" for African Americans. American society was deeply segregated, and *Jim Crow laws* dictated much of American life. A system designed to isolate, subordinate, demoralize, and dehumanize African Americans, these laws promoted the enforcement of discrimination.

For example, *Jim Crow laws* forbade whites to shake hands with blacks or to use courtesy titles when addressing them, forced the existence of separate lavatory facilities, forbade white nurses to treat black males, and forbade white

teachers to teach black students.

South Carolina made it a crime for black and white mill workers to simultaneously look out the same window. Courtrooms in Atlanta provided separate *Jim Crow Bibles* for their witnesses to swear upon: one for blacks and another for whites.

The social climate and legal system succeeded in leading too many Americans of all races into believing that African Americans had done little of which to be proud. As a consequence, many Americans treated people of color as if they were less than fully human.

In the midst of this, the power base of the Ku Klux Klan increased dramatically. By the mid-20s an estimated three million white Americans had become members of the KKK. As would be expected, the frequency of violent attacks/hate crimes against black Americans also escalated.

Concerned about these social conditions and the need for African Americans to express self-efficacy and racial pride, Dr. Woodson and the Association for the Study of Negro Life felt it necessary to create a time to reflect on the accomplishments of African Americans. Dr. Woodson, Dr. W.E.B. Dubois and other black historians and social scientists thus set out to systematically prove that African Americans

had actively participated in the advancement of human life.

The historians' focus was not only on the heroic deeds performed by exceptional women and men, but also on the actions and contributions of unknown individuals. The belief held by these African American historians was that the denial of the contributions of black people to the progress of human life is an intentionally delusional distortion of human history.

Today the national observance formerly referred to as *Negro History Week* has been expanded to encompass the entire month of February. The common means of observing African American History Month is with speeches, films, presentations, theatrical performances and exhibits that focus on providing factual historical information.

UNLV's African American student organizations have planned a month full of activities and events designed to serve the entire campus. The events are centered in the belief that African American history is American history that is meant to be shared with and enjoyed by all.

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THE REBEL YELL

The Student Newspaper of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas

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