

Portrait of a Pioneer: An Analysis of Print Media Coverage of Ryan White, 1985-1990

A thesis presented to
the faculty of
the Scripps College of Communication of Ohio University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Science

Andrew J. Heger

December 2013

© 2013 Andrew J. Heger. All Rights Reserved.

This thesis titled
Portrait of a Pioneer: An Analysis of Print Media Coverage of Ryan White, 1985-1990

by
ANDREW J. HEGER

has been approved for
the E.W. Scripps School of Journalism
and the Scripps College of Communication by

Michael S. Sweeney
Professor of Journalism

Scott Titsworth
Dean, Scripps College of Communication

ABSTRACT

HEGER, ANDREW J., M.S., December 2013, Journalism

Portrait of a Pioneer: An Analysis of Print Media Coverage of Ryan White, 1985-1990

Director of Thesis: Michael S. Sweeney

Since 1981, one of the biggest medical and public health issues has been the discovery and rapid rise of the acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). In the United States, AIDS was initially characterized by both the medical community and the press as a “gay disease.” A young teen hemophiliac, Ryan White, acquired AIDS through a routine blood transfusion, and, as a result, was banned from attending school in 1985. The ensuing legal battle between his family and Western Schools Corporation, and his subsequent role as an advocate for AIDS awareness, resulted in extensive local and national media coverage of White until his death in 1990.

Through an analysis of local and national print media articles and interviews with White’s mother, Jeanne, and journalists who covered White’s story, this study is a historical look at the role the local and national press played in changing the public’s perception of AIDS through its coverage of White.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the Ohio University faculty and staff for their assistance and support throughout the process of completing my Master of Science in Journalism. My chair, Dr. Michael S. Sweeney, along with committee members Dr. Patrick Washburn and Professor Ellen Gerl, were invaluable to not only the completion of my thesis, but also to my understanding of the field of journalism.

A special thank you also goes to my best friends Karen and Dharma for their love, inspiration, and constant support. Finally, I must thank my family, especially my parents, David and Mary, for their support and encouragement throughout my graduate school experience.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract.....	iii
Acknowledgments.....	iv
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2: Literature Review and Method.....	9
Chapter 3: Local Print Media Coverage	35
Chapter 4: National Print Media Coverage.....	55
Chapter 5: Conclusion.....	83
Bibliography	99
Appendix: Institutional Review Board Approval	107

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Since 1981, one of the biggest medical and public health issues has been the discovery and rapid rise of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) throughout the world. The media coverage of this deadly epidemic has increased as more information about it has become available.

HIV/AIDS is a disease of the human immune system. HIV affects specific cells of the immune system, called CD4 cells, or T-cells.¹ These are the white blood cells that send signals to activate the body's immune response when they detect "intruders," such as viruses or bacteria.² Over time, HIV can destroy so many of these cells that the body can't fight off infections and disease. When a person's CD4 T-cell count falls below 200 cells per cubic millimeter of blood (200 cells/mm³), HIV infection is considered to have progressed to AIDS.³ AIDS eliminates the body's defenses against infection, making a person vulnerable to any virus or germ. This puts a person at risk for opportunistic infections, which take advantage of the weakened immune system and cause devastating illnesses.⁴

HIV lives and reproduces in blood and other body fluids and is transmitted through body fluids in very specific ways: during unprotected sexual contact; through

¹ "What is HIV?" U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, accessed August 8, 2013, <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics/whatishiv.html>

² "What is a CD4 Cell or T-Cell?" AIDS.gov, accessed October 10, 2013, <http://www.aids.gov/hiv-aids-basics/just-diagnosed-with-hiv-aids/understand-your-test-results/cd4-count/>

³ "What is HIV?"

⁴ "Opportunistic Infections and Their Relationship to HIV/AIDS," AIDS.gov, accessed October 10, 2013, <http://www.aids.gov/hiv-aids-basics/staying-healthy-with-hiv-aids/potential-related-health-problems/opportunistic-infections/>

contaminated blood transfusions or donation of infected organs; via the sharing of hypodermic needles; and during pregnancy, childbirth, or breastfeeding.⁵ Since the first cases of what would later be known as AIDS were reported in the United States in 1981, it is estimated that 1.7 million people have been infected with HIV, including more than 619,000 who have died.⁶

Scientists identified a type of chimpanzee in West Africa as the source of HIV infection in humans. Studies indicate that HIV may have jumped from apes to humans as far back as the late 1800s, with the virus existing in the U.S. since around the mid- to late-1970s.⁷

During the infancy of AIDS in the U.S., a young boy from the rural Midwest, Ryan White, became an international symbol of courage, dedication, and tolerance in the face of the devastating AIDS epidemic. His battle became a local and national news story that impacted public knowledge of the disease in the years that followed.

Perhaps no one did more for quashing early stereotypes associated with AIDS than White. Born on December 6, 1971, in Kokomo, Indiana, he was diagnosed as a severe hemophiliac from an early age and received blood transfusions throughout his childhood of the drug Factor VIII, which was used to treat his condition. On December 17, 1984, he was diagnosed with full-blown AIDS during a partial lung removal. It was discovered that he had received a batch of Factor VIII that was tainted with HIV while in

⁵ "How Do You Get HIV or AIDS?" AIDS.gov, accessed August 8, 2013, <http://www.aids.gov/hiv-aids-basics/hiv-aids-101/how-you-get-hiv-aids/>

⁶ "U.S. Statistics," AIDS.gov, accessed October 6, 2013, <http://www.aids.gov/hiv-aids-basics/hiv-aids-101/statistics/>

⁷ "What is HIV?"

the hospital for pneumonia.⁸ Originally, doctors told him that he had no more than six months to live.⁹

At the time, the public was still learning about HIV and AIDS, as these terms did not become part of the American lexicon until the early 1980s. On June 5, 1981, the U.S. Center for Disease Control (CDC) in Atlanta published a report of *Pneumocystis carinii* pneumonia in five previously healthy, young men in Los Angeles in its publication, *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*. These men were later recognized as the first cases of AIDS in the U.S.¹⁰ The report acknowledged that all five men were homosexuals, and early media coverage of AIDS was dominated by these initial reports of a “gay pneumonia.”¹¹ A 1991 article on the AIDS epidemic in the *New England Journal of Medicine* stated: “AIDS was at first almost exclusively a disease of homosexual men. It therefore carried the stigma of any sexually transmitted disease, but unlike syphilis and gonorrhea, it also carried a stigma of homosexuality.”¹²

When the public became aware of White’s condition on March 3, 1985, in an article published about him in the *Kokomo Tribune*, he put a different face on this cruel disease. Because he was not homosexual, he helped bring awareness that AIDS could be contracted by anyone. Since AIDS research was still in its infancy when his story broke,

⁸ “Ryan’s Story,” RyanWhite.com, accessed February 24, 2008, <http://www.ryanwhite.com/pages/story.html>

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ K.A. Fenton and R.O. Valdiserri, “Twenty-Five Years of HIV/AIDS—United States, 1981-2006,” *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 55 (2006): 585-89.

¹¹ Mollyann Brodie, Elizabeth Hamel, Lee Ann Brady, Jennifer Kates, and Drew E. Altman, “AIDS at 21: Media Coverage of the AIDS Epidemic: 1981-2002,” *Columbia Journalism Review* 42 (2004): S1-S8.

¹² Marcia Angell, “A Dual Approach to the AIDS Epidemic,” *New England Journal of Medicine* 324 (1991): 1498.

concern among the local community increased, and he was banned on July 30, 1985, from attending Western Middle School in Russiaville, Indiana. He and his family, who included his single mother, Jeanne, and his sister, Andrea, endured a prolonged legal battle against Western Schools Corporation in order for him to attend school despite his disease.

In the summer of 1987, Jeanne, who said she did not want to stay where they were unwanted, moved her family to Cicero, Indiana, where they were welcomed by both the community and White's new school, Hamilton Heights High School.¹³ Over the next two years, White got his wish—to be accepted by his classmates and neighbors—and also became a prominent national spokesman for the disease, appearing on numerous television shows (including *Nightline*, *Phil Donahue*, *Today*, and *Good Morning America*) and testifying before the White House AIDS commission. He became friends with famous people, such as U.S. President Ronald Reagan and musicians Michael Jackson and Elton John, and there was even an ABC television movie about his life, *The Ryan White Story*, which was broadcast in January 1989. White's advocacy for AIDS awareness, and his resulting media celebrity, lasted until April 8, 1990, when he died at Riley Hospital for Children in Indianapolis from a respiratory infection that occurred as a complication of AIDS.¹⁴

A few months after his death, Congress passed P.L. 101-381, the Ryan White Comprehensive AIDS Resources Emergency (CARE) Act, the largest federal program dedicated to providing care and treatment for people living with HIV. The program is

¹³ "Ryan White's 5-year Battle," *Indianapolis News*, April 9, 1990.

¹⁴ Ibid.

currently administered by the Health Resources and Services Administration and aims to improve the quality of care for low-income or uninsured individuals and families with HIV and AIDS who do not otherwise have access to care.¹⁵

Once an issue receives media coverage, it usually remains on the news agenda for a fairly limited amount of time, often less than a month.¹⁶ However, White's story lasted five years in the media. Many people around the world learned about White from the hundreds of articles written about him. His story, though, began and grew with the local media, especially the local newspapers. The local newspapers included his hometown daily paper, the *Tribune*, where he was a paperboy, and two newspapers fifty miles south of Kokomo in Indianapolis, the state's largest media market. These two newspapers, the *Indianapolis Star* and the *Indianapolis News*, were that city's morning and afternoon dailies, respectively, during this time.

White's story also captured the attention of the print media across the nation. For example, White was featured prominently in national newspapers such as the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *USA Today*, and appeared on the covers of national magazines such as *People*.

Even though there are journalists who covered White who realize the importance of his story to the overall media coverage of the U.S. AIDS epidemic, little academic research has been done on the story's specific impact.¹⁷ A general search into multiple academic journal databases has retrieved significant research solely about the U.S.

¹⁵ "Modernizing the Ryan White CARE Act," National Minority Health Care Foundation, accessed July 2, 2008, <http://www.ryanwhitecareact.org/about/>

¹⁶ Everett M. Rogers, James W. Dearing, and Soonbum Chang, "AIDS in the 1980s: The Agenda-Setting Process for a Public Issue," *Journalism Monographs* 126 (April 1991): 2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

media's overall coverage of AIDS throughout the epidemic's history in the country but no publication regarding the impact of White's case alone. For example, a twenty-one-year study by the Kaiser Family Foundation recognized that White was one of the key public figures in the early media coverage of the disease, yet it does not explain why or how his story was significant.¹⁸ This thesis will fill this void in academic research on the U.S. media's early coverage of AIDS by focusing entirely on White's story in the print media.

The media coverage of White had an impact on cultivating awareness and understanding of AIDS. His story not only changed the news agenda of AIDS in the press, it helped change the public's perception of the disease. White's story also introduced AIDS to publications covering the disease in their local markets, and helped increase print media coverage of AIDS nationally.¹⁹

This study is a historical look at the print media coverage of White from when his story first came to light in 1985 through his death in 1990. Through a review of previous literature on the topic, a reading and textual analysis of selected local and national print media publications, and first-hand accounts of those journalists who covered White, this thesis gives a historical perspective of White—from his experience as a local outcast and national advocate for AIDS awareness to his enduring legacy.

Before White, mass communications researchers claim the major U.S. media outlets were slow to cover the AIDS epidemic,²⁰ even though thousands of people were

¹⁸ Brodie, et.al, "AIDS at 21: Media Coverage of the AIDS Epidemic: 1981-2002," S1-S8.

¹⁹ Rogers, Dearing, and Chang, "AIDS in the 1980s."

²⁰ Ibid., 13.

dying from the disease. In their landmark study on media coverage of AIDS in the 1980s, Everett Rogers, et.al, found that six major U.S. media outlets (the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Washington Post*, *ABC*, *CBS*, and *NBC*) averaged around a combined fourteen news stories about AIDS per month prior to July 1985, yet averaged around a combined 143 stories per month from July 1985, through December 1988.²¹ Because of the spike of news coverage on AIDS that developed after his story became public, White helped to increase public awareness that AIDS was a significant epidemic.²² However, limited research has been conducted on the impact White's story had on public perception of the disease. In his 1989 book, *Covering the Plague: AIDS and the American Media*, author James Kinsella wrote briefly about the tough decisions *Tribune* editors and reporters faced in covering White's story while their town was scrutinized by the national media for its supposed treatment of White and his family.²³ This study expands on this information through first-hand accounts that will provide additional perspectives of the *Tribune* during these years. In addition, this study includes other local print publications that extensively covered White but were not previously analyzed.

Further, this study will analyze themes associated with White's story, using mass communication theories such as framing and objectivity of the press. For example, AIDS, before White, had been treated in the medical community and the press as a primarily "gay disease." Therefore, it is important to explore the influence White's story had on the public's knowledge of the disease through an analysis of how the print media portrayed

²¹ Ibid.

²² Brodie, et.al, "AIDS at 21: Media Coverage of the AIDS Epidemic: 1981-2002," S1-S8.

²³ James Kinsella, *Covering the Plague: AIDS and the American Media* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989): 185-93.

him. This study also will compare how White and his local community, in both the context of his battle against the disease and in his resulting celebrity, were covered by the local and national press, and what this says about the news values of both types of publications.

Therefore, the goal of this thesis is to not only analyze how White was covered in both local and national print media from 1985 to 1990 from a historical research perspective but to get a better understanding as to why White's story was important to the history and development of the U.S. media's coverage of AIDS. The hope is that this thesis and its analysis will benefit those journalists tasked with reporting on future diseases with social stigmas.

The next chapter will review previous literature related to the print media coverage of AIDS, including early coverage before White's story broke and after he died, and what previous research of AIDS coverage in the media says about White's influence. In addition, the method for the historical research conducted in this thesis will be explained.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHOD

This chapter provides a summary review of academic literature on the history of print media coverage of AIDS before, during, and after Ryan White's time as a national figure from 1985 through 1990. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, themes explored in this chapter include the role of the news agenda, framing, objectivity, and public opinion in the print media's coverage of AIDS. Incorporating this research is useful for determining how context can influence the impact of a story. This research summary sets a foundation for the study's historical analysis of print media coverage of White in order to build a better understanding of his influence on how the press covered the disease in the United States during its infancy.

Literature Review

Several studies have been done on the history of U.S. media coverage of AIDS, including its place on the news agenda, how its coverage was framed over time, and its effect on public opinion. The news agenda is defined by the list of events or issues that are viewed at one point in time ranked in the hierarchy of importance.¹ The agenda-setting theory refers to the ability of the media to influence what the public thinks is important. This theory was introduced by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw, whose investigation of the 1968 U.S. presidential campaign found that the mass media had an

¹ Everett M. Rogers and James W. Dearing, "Agenda-Setting Research: Where Has It Been? Where Is It Going?" *Communication Yearbook* 11 (1988): 555-94.

influence on what voters considered the campaign's major issues.² This theory stems most directly from Bernard Cohen,³ who observed that the press "may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about." He added that "the world will look different to different people depending on the map that is drawn for them by writers, editors, and publishers of the papers they read."⁴

Studies have shown that U.S. media coverage of AIDS has influenced public knowledge of, opinion about, and behavioral response toward the disease, as well as public policy regarding research, funding, and education.⁵ Since the beginning of the epidemic, the news media have played an integral role, for better or worse, in educating the public about the disease.⁶ The media continue to be a vital source of information about AIDS for most Americans thirty years into the epidemic.⁷

In terms of sheer quantity, Mollyann Brodie and colleagues reported in 2004 that news coverage of AIDS in the U.S. peaked in 1987 (five thousand stories from the newspapers and broadcasts included in their study) yet declined steadily in both print and

² Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw, "The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (1972): 176-87.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Bernard C. Cohen, *The Press and Foreign Policy* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963): 3.

⁵ Robin C. Stevens and Shawnika J. Hull, "The Colour of AIDS: An Analysis of Newspaper Coverage of HIV/AIDS in the United States from 1992–2007," *Critical Arts* 27, no. 3 (2013): 353.

⁶ Mollyann Brodie, Elizabeth Hamel, Lee Ann Brady, Jennifer Kates, and Drew E. Altman, "AIDS at 21: Media Coverage of the AIDS Epidemic: 1981-2002," *Columbia Journalism Review* 42 (2004): S1-S8.

⁷ Ibid.

broadcast media coverage (fewer than one thousand stories in 2002).⁸ Media coverage of AIDS has generally reflected key events,⁹ which aligns with theories that say media coverage of trends is event-driven.¹⁰ After each major event occurred, the amount of coverage declined until another event refreshed media interest and added different angles to the story. Intense bursts of coverage, skipping from one event or crisis to another, often lacked follow up and evaluation or explanation of how one event or crisis might have led to the next.¹¹

Researchers conclude that, in retrospect, from 1981 to 1985, the media's agenda-setting process for AIDS was held up by the inaction of the U.S. government and the inattention of major news sources, such as the *New York Times*.¹² Real-world indicators, such as rates of HIV infection and the number of AIDS deaths, did not play an important role in initially setting the media agenda in the U.S. Instead, studies show that, in the initial stages of the epidemic, homophobia on the part of news people and the public kept AIDS from getting the news attention it deserved. However, once it became part of the U.S. media's agenda, AIDS retained a priority position for years at a time because of the interplay of: (1) constantly new information about the issue, which, when interpreted by journalists and editors in the context of the ongoing social problem, remake the issue as

⁸ Ibid., S2.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Paula A. Treichler, *How to Have Theory in an Epidemic: Cultural Chronicles of AIDS* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press Books, 1999): 77.

¹¹ Kristen Alley Swain, "Approaching the Quarter-Century Mark: AIDS Coverage and Research Decline as Infection Spreads," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 22, no. 3 (August 2005): 259.

¹² Everett M. Rogers, James W. Dearing, and Soonbum Chang, "AIDS in the 1980s: The Agenda-Setting Process for a Public Issue," *Journalism Monographs* 126 (April 1991).

being important in a new way; and (2) attention given to the issue on agendas other than the mass media agenda, such as the scientific agenda, the polling agenda, the public agenda, and the policy agenda.¹³

In addition, journalists and editors make subjective decisions about the degree to which a news issue reflects, or can be made to reflect, these characteristics. These decisions can determine the extent of mass media coverage that an issue receives.¹⁴ At the same time, the media agenda-setting process is influenced by the amount of news coverage given to an issue of study by certain influential media such as the *Times*.¹⁵

It has been said that media are the most critical source of public information,¹⁶ and that the news media industry must continually respond to pressures to provide newsworthy content. However, newsworthiness, often typified by novelty or sensationalism, does not lend itself to contextualized reporting on a topic, particularly when the topic is a disease as complex and persistent as AIDS.¹⁷ The media also face challenges to report responsibly given uncertain information, such as technical uncertainties and scientific disagreements.¹⁸ In addition, various factions of society have an agenda relating to sensitive topics. Influences on agendas include the character and background of individual journalists, since each comes from his or her own unique frame

¹³ Ibid., 2.

¹⁴ Pamela J. Shoemaker with Elizabeth Kay Mayfield, "Building a Theory of News Content: A Synthesis of Current Approaches," *Journalism Monographs* 103 (June 1987): 4.

¹⁵ Rogers, Dearing, and Chang, "AIDS in the 1980s," 4.

¹⁶ Dorothy Nelkin, "AIDS and the News Media," *The Milbank Quarterly* 69, no. 2 (1991): 293.

¹⁷ Shoemaker with Mayfield, "Building a Theory of News Content."

¹⁸ Nelkin, "AIDS and the News Media," 294.

of reference, and economic pressures, such as budget and competition, regional or local interest, and different ideologies.¹⁹

When determining the news agenda, risk events (such as White's story) are considered most newsworthy when they involve human interest or personal dramas.²⁰ Journalists in mainstream media strive for objectivity. In risk events, which are events that require interpretive judgment in the face of uncertainty and scientific disagreement,²¹ reporters strive to get opposing viewpoints; however, studies have shown that, not surprisingly, advocates of an issue try to influence style and content of news media portrayals of their issues.²²

Media coverage of AIDS over the years has evolved from having an air of mystery to reports of panic, stigma, and homophobia; from domestic epidemiology and policies to international crises and drug access. As a news topic, AIDS has not only been a health story, but also one about arts, culture, taboo, sexuality, religion, celebrity, business, and politics on the local, national, and global stage.²³

Failure to provide adequate coverage of an epidemic among disproportionately affected groups can reduce the extent to which the public views widening disparities as an important problem.²⁴ In his book, *Covering the Plague: AIDS and the American*

¹⁹ Pamela J. Shoemaker and Stephen D. Reese, *Mediating the Message: Theories of Influences on Mass Media Content* (White Plains, New York: Longman Publishers, 1996).

²⁰ Nelkin, "AIDS and the News Media," 295.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 294.

²² *Ibid.*, 296.

²³ Brodie, et.al, "AIDS at 21: Media Coverage of the AIDS Epidemic: 1981-2002," S1-S8.

²⁴ Stevens and Hull, "The Colour of AIDS," 354.

Media, author James Kinsella wrote about how a small number of news people took the lead in framing the AIDS issue as an important social problem in the U.S. Initially, when AIDS was considered a “gay stigma,” the media were squeamish about reporting on AIDS. Reporters could not use terms such as “anal intercourse,” “swallowing semen,” “fisting,” or “rimming.”²⁵

Not only did mass media increase their coverage of AIDS in the mid-1980s, but the issue of AIDS was also framed differently. The idea of framing a news story comes from the late sociologist Erving Goffman, who observed that communication media are like a window to the world. The view that is provided may be opaque or clear, large or small, depending on the nature of the window, including whether it looks out on the street or on a back yard.²⁶ Gradually, the media framed the AIDS story by putting a human face on the epidemic through telling the stories of individuals living with AIDS.²⁷

In addition, research has shown that media coverage of AIDS stories has had an influence on public opinion. For example, a 1989 article by Horst Stipp and Dennis Kerr examined the determinants of public opinion about AIDS. Their findings suggested that anti-gay attitudes constrained the ability of the media to effectively communicate information about risk factors and how the disease was transmitted, and researchers needed to explore the possibility that anti-gay attitudes stood between media information and public knowledge and public opinion. Fear can mobilize, but it can also paralyze—

²⁵ Arvind Singhal and Everett M. Rogers, *Combating AIDS: Communication Strategies in Action* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2003): 84. Fisting is the insertion of a whole hand into the rectum or vagina for sexual stimulation. Rimming is oral-to-anal contact for sexual stimulation.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

which is what AIDS did when it first appeared. And no one—not the government, not the media, not the gay community itself—reacted fast enough to head off this disaster.²⁸

Opinion polls in the U.S. showed the public learned about AIDS primarily through media.²⁹ In an October 2003 survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation, 72 percent of the U.S. public said that most of the information they get about AIDS came from the media, including television, newspapers, and radio.³⁰ As media coverage of AIDS increased, so did public knowledge of the disease. However, public opinion survey results suggest that while the U.S. public became aware of the disease by the mid-1980s, many individuals continued to be confused about certain aspects of the issue of AIDS.³¹

By 1983, 81 percent of a national sample reported that they had heard or read about a disease called AIDS; this figure increased to 92 percent by mid-1983, then increased slowly to 98 percent by early 1986, and has remained at this high level. By April 1985, 84 percent said that one could become infected with HIV by receiving a blood transfusion, and by March 1987 this figure increased to 97 percent; comparable figures for HIV transmission from a sneeze decreased from 22 percent to 11 percent. So correct understanding of the means of transmission increased as this topic was increasingly covered by the media. When respondents were asked the most important

²⁸ David Jefferson and Ramin Setoodeh, “How AIDS Changed America,” *Newsweek*, May 15, 2006, 36-41.

²⁹ Nelkin, “AIDS and the News Media,” 303.

³⁰ Brodie, et.al, “AIDS at 21: Media Coverage of the AIDS Epidemic: 1981-2002,” S1-S8.

³¹ Rogers, Dearing, and Chang, “AIDS in the 1980s,” 7-8; Alonzo Plough and Sheldon Krinsky, “The Emergence of Risk Communication Studies: Social and Political Context,” *Science, Technology, and Human Values* 12, nos. 3-4 (1987): 4-10.

health problem facing the U.S., AIDS was at 31 percent in late 1985, rose to 33 percent in late 1986, and went to 70 percent in an April 1987 poll.³²

Media coverage of AIDS has, at times, helped shape the policy agenda as well. In many cases, the news media have served as an important source of information about the epidemic for the public. As Cohen said, they tell us not what to think, but rather what to think about. So, when the media finally began to give attention to AIDS, it climbed the public agenda and began to command an emphasis from policymakers,³³ which resulted in certain government actions such as the creation of the Ryan White CARE Act.

Initial print media coverage of AIDS was characterized by confusion, denial, and uncertainty about how to handle the unknown.³⁴ The initial *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* noted that the “patients did not know each other and had no known common contacts or knowledge of sexual partners who had had similar illnesses.” It added: “The fact that these patients were all homosexuals suggests an association between some aspect of a homosexual lifestyle or disease acquired through sexual contact and *Pneumocystis pneumonia* in this population.”³⁵ In 1981, AIDS was referred to as a “rare cancer seen in homosexuals,”³⁶ and it wasn’t a story the press wanted to cover.

³² Rogers, Dearing, and Chang, “AIDS in the 1980s,” 22.

³³ Singhal and Rogers, *Combating AIDS*, 84.

³⁴ Swain, “Approaching the Quarter-Century Mark,” 258.

³⁵ K.A. Fenton and R.O. Valdiserri, “Twenty-Five Years of HIV/AIDS—United States, 1981-2006,” *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 55 (2006): 585-89.

³⁶ Lawrence K. Altman, “Rare Cancer Seen in 41 Homosexuals,” *New York Times*, July 3, 1981, accessed August 18, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/1981/07/03/us/rare-cancer-seen-in-41-homosexuals.html>

Further distorting AIDS coverage in its early years was the media's tendency to occasionally frame AIDS patients into two different groups: "guilty victims," such as homosexuals and intravenous drug users, both of whom had contracted the disease through behaviors that were perceived as controllable and "deviant;"³⁷ and "innocent victims," such as White, who was both a child and a hemophiliac.³⁸ The media continuously capitalized on these references to "innocent victims" of AIDS in the media, which implied that other people with AIDS were considered "blameworthy."³⁹ In his 1989 *New York Times Magazine* article, "The Way I Live Now," author David Leavitt wrote about his concerns with the release of a recent novel, *At Risk* by Alice Hoffman, which told the story of an 11-year-old girl who contracts AIDS from a blood transfusion:

We sensed, in some deep way, that this was going to be bad for us. After all, "At Risk" was the story of a child, one of the so-called innocent victims of AIDS whose stories—because they escape our society's prejudices against gay men and drug users—are deemed more palatable to a "general" audience. What made me nervous was the implication, inherent in the phrase "innocent victim," that the majority of people with AIDS are "guilty" victims, who had brought the disease on themselves by engaging in homosexual sex or shooting drugs. Wasn't it those people, after all, who had donated the tainted blood in the first place? Weren't they on some level responsible for the plight of the child, the children?⁴⁰

While the media had a field day with Legionnaire's disease, toxic shock syndrome, and the cyanide-laced Tylenol tragedy, all of which were notable public health scares and epidemics in the late 1970s and early 1980s, few outlets paid much attention to

³⁷ Gregory M. Herek and John P. Capitanio, "AIDS Stigma and Sexual Prejudice," *American Behavioral Scientist* 42, no. 7 (1999): 1134.

³⁸ E. Glenn Schellenberg, Janet M. Keil, and Sandra L. Bem, "Innocent Victims of AIDS: Identifying the Subtext," *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 25 (1995): 1790-1800.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ David Leavitt, "The Way I Live Now," *New York Times*, July 9, 1989, accessed October 10, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/07/09/magazine/the-way-i-live-now.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>

the new, mysterious syndrome that was eventually known as AIDS, even after scores of people had died. Even the gay press missed the story at first. Afraid of alarming the community and inflaming anti-gay forces, editors at the *New York Native* slapped the headline “Disease Rumors Largely Unfounded” atop the very first press report about the syndrome, which ran on May 18, 1981. There were a few notable exceptions, particularly the work of the late Randy Shilts, an openly gay journalist who convinced his editors at the *San Francisco Chronicle* to let him cover AIDS as a full-time beat. His reporting led to his landmark 1987 book, *And the Band Played On*, a detailed account of how the nation’s failure to take AIDS seriously allowed the disease to spread exponentially in the early 1980s.⁴¹

Kinsella stated that the U.S. media came too late and gave too little attention regarding coverage of AIDS. He believes that had the media not failed to warn the public and government officials about the epidemic, thousands might have been able to avoid infection or death.⁴² The *Times* ran four cover articles on cyanide-laced Tylenol in the U.S., which claimed seven lives in 1982, and printed more than fifty articles in a three-month span. It took four years and 20,000 AIDS deaths before the media, including the *Times*, began to give significant news coverage to the issue of AIDS.⁴³

As AIDS made its death march across the nation, it left an indelible mark on our history and culture. It changed so many things in so many ways, including how the media

⁴¹ Jefferson and Setoodeh, “How AIDS Changed America,” 36-41.

⁴² James Kinsella, *Covering the Plague: AIDS and the American Media* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989): 185-93.

⁴³ Singhal and Rogers, *Combating AIDS*, 81-82.

portray homosexuality.⁴⁴ However, in the case of the AIDS issue, researchers say this legitimizing role of major print media sources, such as the *Times*, occurred relatively late, more than five years into the epidemic.⁴⁵ Early coverage of AIDS was very conservative, and journalists provided little critical analysis that might have called early attention to the growing number of other groups with AIDS, such as women.⁴⁶

Organizational and personal variables partially explain the lag in early *Times* coverage of AIDS. For the first five years of the AIDS epidemic, the *Times* refused to use the word “gay” within its coverage of AIDS, except within quoted passages.⁴⁷ Reporters may have felt that their news stories about a gay-related issue such as AIDS would be unlikely to appear on the front page. In the early years of the epidemic, the weekly reports by the CDC on the number of AIDS deaths did not put the issue of AIDS on the U.S. media agenda. The media reported these data, but the issue of AIDS did not yet have a human face.⁴⁸ National medical and science reporters, such as Dr. Lawrence Altman of the *Times*, had stories about AIDS rejected for publication in 1981 and 1982.⁴⁹

The first front-page article in the *Times* about AIDS did not appear until May 25, 1983, when 108 AIDS cases had been reported to the CDC, about half of them in New

⁴⁴ Jefferson and Setoodeh, “How AIDS Changed America,” 36-41.

⁴⁵ Rogers, Dearing, and Chang, “AIDS in the 1980s,” 11.

⁴⁶ Nelkin, “AIDS and the News Media,” 298-99.

⁴⁷ Rogers, Dearing, and Chang, “AIDS in the 1980s,” 11.

⁴⁸ Singhal and Rogers, *Combating AIDS*, 83.

⁴⁹ Nelkin, “AIDS and the News Media,” 297.

York City. Clearly, the *Times* did not play a dominant role in setting the U.S. media agenda for AIDS in the very early years of the epidemic.⁵⁰

After AIDS was found to occur in babies and among individuals who had received transfusions of the infected blood, such as hemophiliacs, in early 1983, the print media began to give somewhat greater attention to the issue of AIDS.⁵¹ AIDS coverage significantly increased when, on May 6, 1983, the *Journal of the American Medical Association* announced that suggested “routine household contact” might spread AIDS. The mass media gave considerable attention to this announcement.⁵² For example, Rogers, et.al, found that six major media sources in their study published or broadcast an average of about fifty stories a month for the four months immediately after this announcement; this compares to the fifty-nine total stories about AIDS the same six media published during the previous two years.⁵³

Previous studies have conducted a historical timeline of AIDS coverage by both the *Times* and the *Washington Post* in their early years. The *Times* ran fewer than a dozen stories about the new killer in 1981 and 1982, almost all of them buried inside the paper. A July 3, 1981, *Times* article on page A-20,⁵⁴ covering the CDC’s second report of the disease, described outbreaks of “a rare and often rapidly fatal form of cancer” that has made a “sudden appearance” among homosexual men. The *Times* stated that the *Kaposi’s*

⁵⁰ Rogers, Dearing, and Chang, “AIDS in the 1980s,” 11.

⁵¹ Ibid., 13.

⁵² Ibid., 11; Anthony S. Fauci, “The Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 249 (1983): 2375.

⁵³ Rogers, Dearing, and Chang, “AIDS in the 1980s,” 11-12.

⁵⁴ Altman, “Rare Cancer Seen in 41 Homosexuals.”

sarcoma outbreaks “prompted a medical investigation that experts say could have as much scientific as public health importance because of what it may teach about determining the causes of more common types of cancer.” The end of the article stated that the researchers examining the outbreaks said that “some indirect evidence actually points away from contagion as a cause” and quoted CDC spokesperson Dr. James Curran as saying that there is “no apparent danger to non-homosexuals from contagion.”⁵⁵

The *Post* on July 4, 1981, reported that the “rare form of cancer,” which “primarily affects men over 50” and was believed to “progress slowly over about 10 years,” had killed eight of the approximately twenty-six “victims” within two years of diagnosis. In an August 30, 1981, article, the *Post* reported that the “two rare diseases” (*pneumocystis carinii* and *Kaposi’s sarcoma*) were a “medical mystery ... on the scale of the toxic shock syndrome or Legionnaire’s disease.”⁵⁶

By 1982, AIDS was so thoroughly identified as a gay disease that it “was viewed as much as a gay phenomenon as a medical phenomenon.”⁵⁷ At first, the mysterious disease was known as “gay-related immune deficiency syndrome” (GRID), otherwise known as the “gay plague.” On June 18, 1982, the CDC released its first report connecting a sexually transmitted agent with the outbreaks of *Kaposi’s sarcoma*, *pneumocystis pneumonia*, and other opportunistic infections appearing among young, gay men. The report stated that one “hypothesis” pertaining to the outbreaks is that

⁵⁵ “The Kaiser Daily HIV/AIDS Report Examines Early Media Reporting on AIDS, 20 Years Later,” *Kaiser Health News’ Daily Report*, June 4, 2001, accessed August 18, 2013, <http://www.kaiserhealthnews.org/Daily-Reports/2001/June/04/dr00004944>

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Randy Shilts, *And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1987): 213.

“infectious agents” responsible for the diseases are being “sexually transmitted among homosexually active males.”⁵⁸

The *Times* subsequently described the syndrome, on August 8, 1982, as a “serious disease” that has “touched off anxiety among homosexuals,” “engendered . . . fear,” and caused physicians to become “panic-stricken.” Although medical researchers had by now named the condition AIDS, or acquired immune deficiency syndrome—a name created to include all emerging demographics afflicted with the disease—the paper stated that the condition “remains largely mysterious.”⁵⁹

In 1982, several CDC reports revealed AIDS’ appearance in other populations, such as hemophiliacs, Haitians, and intravenous drug users. On December 10, 1982, the agency stated that although the factors that caused AIDS were still “unknown,” an infectious agent that caused the condition might be transmitted through blood. The *Post* reported on December 12, 1982, about the “alarming discovery” by health officials that a nonhemophiliac infant had developed AIDS after receiving a blood transfusion from a man who “unknowingly had the disease.” Dr. Harold Jaffe, an AIDS researcher, said, “This is the first possible case of AIDS that can be linked with another case directly through a blood transfusion.” Although newspapers reported these findings, they continued to emphasize that the condition was mainly found in gay men. For example, a December 10, 1982, *Times* article on the infant case stated twice in the first two

⁵⁸ “The Kaiser Daily HIV/AIDS Report.”

⁵⁹ Ibid.

paragraphs that the condition “has been linked primarily to homosexual men” and “has principally afflicted homosexuals.”⁶⁰

In 1983, another group joined the list of those at “high risk” for HIV infection: blood transfusion recipients, particularly hemophiliacs. By January 1983, the CDC had identified eight cases of AIDS among hemophiliacs.⁶¹ While hemophiliacs were often viewed as “innocent victims” of the epidemic, having contracted the virus through necessary blood transfusions, many still had to face discrimination associated with being HIV-positive.

In mid-1983, researchers, like Altman, reported that AIDS might be transmitted through heterosexual sex as well. Subsequently, a number of news reports, opinion pieces, and editorials appeared documenting the disease. On April 22, 1983, Kevin Cahill, then director of the tropical disease center at New York’s Lenox Hill Hospital, wrote in a *Times* op-ed that as “the numbers afflicted [by AIDS] grew . . . an insidious outbreak exploded into a frightening epidemic.”⁶² He added that the “puzzling” condition “led to fear, then panic” as more groups of people were classified as at risk for the disease.⁶³ A May 24, 1983, *Times* article by Altman noted: “In many parts of the world there is anxiety, bafflement, a sense that something has to be done—although no one

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

knows what—about this fatal disease whose full name is Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome and whose cause is still unknown.”⁶⁴

The *Times* reported on August 7, 1983, that a “double epidemic” was spreading: AIDS and a growing fear and intolerance of homosexuals.⁶⁵ With the 1984 discovery of what would later be known as human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), scientists filled in one of the most significant missing pieces of the AIDS puzzle. With the discovery of HIV, health officials knew how AIDS was transmitted and began educating the public about how to avoid contracting the virus. However, the public’s fear of the disease played a role in creating stigma surrounding the four groups the CDC continued to identify as “high risk”: homosexuals, intravenous drug users, Haitian immigrants, and hemophiliacs.⁶⁶

It wasn’t until two tragic stories developed in 1985 that AIDS was largely put on the media agenda.⁶⁷ These stories were the surprising announcement on July 25, 1985, that the masculine, clean-cut (and secretly gay) Hollywood actor Rock Hudson had contracted AIDS (he would die on October 2 of that year), and the July 30, 1985, decision to ban White from attending Western Middle School. The impact of these two news events upon subsequent media coverage of AIDS was great. As a result of their stories, Rogers, et.al, found that coverage of AIDS in the *Times* increased tenfold within a

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Singhal and Rogers, *Combating AIDS*, 83.

month.⁶⁸ In addition, the AIDS issue was rated in national polls in early 1986 as the most important health problem facing the nation.⁶⁹

Major news attention was given to both Hudson and White as tragic figures. They raised public awareness and knowledge about AIDS, and they finally put a human face on the epidemic. These events also saw the media begin to frame the AIDS issue as a human problem, and reporters started paying more attention to the disease.

Rogers, et.al, discovered that it was White's story, more so than Hudson, which propelled AIDS up the media agenda. They found that White was the topic of 117 new stories, while Hudson was the topic of only seventy-four stories in the six media they studied (the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Washington Post*, *ABC*, *CBS*, and *NBC*) over the same time period.⁷⁰ AIDS became not just an epidemic in a unique category of people, but it affected a much wider audience.

Though previous research has concluded the emergence of White's story had a major impact on the print media's coverage of AIDS at the time, there has been no academic study that specifically researched how local and national print media covered White during his time in the public eye. Kinsella briefly addressed the tension faced by Kokomo, and the *Tribune*, in his book, *Covering the Plague*. In this book, he addressed the struggles of one *Tribune* reporter, Christopher MacNeil, in covering White, and how

⁶⁸ Rogers, Dearing, and Chang, "AIDS in the 1980s,"13.

⁶⁹ Singhal and Rogers, *Combating AIDS*, 86.

⁷⁰ Rogers, Dearing, and Chang, "AIDS in the 1980s,"41.

White's story polarized the town of Kokomo and brought national condemnation to the formerly quiet community.⁷¹

Kinsella says MacNeil, a thirty-year-old Kokomo resident at the time, first heard about White almost by accident. In early 1985, the local Red Cross had been asking for local blood donations despite the AIDS-tainted blood that was making news in California. MacNeil was assigned to report on the problem in Kokomo, and officials told him about White.⁷² Most of the *Tribune's* 34,000 readers at the time had no more than a high school education. However, MacNeil wrote more than three hundred articles about AIDS in the sixteen months he covered White's story in order to inform his readers about the disease.⁷³

Kinsella also mentions that White was not the first child with AIDS to be shut out of school, but his protest was the first to be heard in court and the first to gain a national spotlight. *Tribune* publisher Arden Draeger, a longtime Kokomo resident, understood the story, especially as it was being played in the national news, and that it could divide Kokomo. He and managing editor John Wiles spent long hours debating how Kokomo's single daily newspaper should play the story.⁷⁴

Both Draeger and MacNeil thought part of the newspaper's role was that of educator. They reasoned that if people were presented with enough clearly explained facts, they would reach a well-informed, intelligent decision. MacNeil wanted to refute

⁷¹ Kinsella, *Covering the Plague*, 185.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 186.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 187.

the notion that AIDS was a gay disease, that homosexuality itself was a viable basis for discrimination, and that anyone who supported White was gay. He also reported on AIDS patients beyond Kokomo who had experienced discrimination, AIDS outreach and education efforts in Indianapolis, and homophobia in Indiana and elsewhere. He even spoke with people in Swansea, Massachusetts, where another young hemophiliac had found warmth and encouragement from his small town and school.⁷⁵ Wiles and Draeger persisted in running editorials in support of White. No business pulled ads from the *Tribune*, but that could be due to the fact that the newspaper had a monopoly on the market and was one of the few advertising outlets in Kokomo.⁷⁶

Kinsella added that Western School Board President Daniel Carter, who opposed White attending school, believed broadcast media were not as thorough and objective as print media, and that the national media at large were irresponsible. For example, on August 26, 1985, all three networks did a story on White using the same format, yet each network produced a slightly different picture of sentiment at White's school.⁷⁷ The national media's portrayal of Kokomo intensified the local crisis, first polarizing then humiliating residents. Draeger said letters to the editor fell into two categories. Correspondence from people in Kokomo mostly criticized the paper and the Whites for the crisis. People outside the community condemned Kokomo residents and the school.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Ibid., 190-91.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 191.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 189.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 192.

From 1987 on, White mostly showed up when the AIDS story turned to civil rights. A *People* magazine follow-up in the spring of 1988 showed a cheerful Ryan playing with friends in his new hometown of Cicero, Indiana. *People* wrote about White's last days in Kokomo: "If responding to AIDS had become one of the litmus tests of human decency, Kokomo failed it badly."⁷⁹

As in Kokomo, the Ray family in Arcadia, Florida, also fought for local acceptance when three of their four children, who were hemophiliacs like White, also were diagnosed with AIDS. The family was the subject of a 1987 federal court battle against the local DeSoto County School Board to allow their children to attend school.⁸⁰

In the same book, Kinsella said the local paper, the *Arcadian*, didn't cover the Rays story until after an article on them first ran in a larger regional paper, the *Tampa Tribune*. Kinsella wrote that Tim Adamson, editor for the *Arcadian*, played it safe and stopped writing editorials. Unlike the *Kokomo Tribune*, the *Arcadian* had local competition and decided not to take chances with advertisers. Adamson used sources that had no direct experience working with the AIDS virus, and he wasn't considered objective in his reporting.⁸¹

Kinsella wrote that if Hudson's diagnosis touched the heart of Americans—or at least piqued the interest of American journalists—innocent kids afflicted with AIDS

⁷⁹ Ibid., 193.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 194.

⁸¹ Ibid., 197-98.

touched the nation's soul. And unlike most AIDS stories, small-town scenarios provided backdrops and images to frame the drama.⁸²

According to Kinsella, the first major articles on heterosexuality and AIDS began to appear in the *New York Times* in 1986.⁸³ Shortly thereafter, U.S. President Ronald Reagan gave his first public speech about AIDS in May 1987, six years into the epidemic, a time when 35,121 AIDS cases had been reported by the CDC.⁸⁴ The administration saw the growing AIDS epidemic as a federal budget threat, and moved very slowly in the early years to provide funds or other support for AIDS research or prevention.⁸⁵

After White's death in 1990, many AIDS advocates said he "served as a deterrent to bigotry throughout the nation."⁸⁶ Thomas Brandt, spokesperson for the National Commission on AIDS, said: "After seeing a person like Ryan White—such a fine and loving and gentle person—it was hard for people to justify discrimination against people who suffer from this terrible disease."⁸⁷

It finally became apparent that AIDS was a systemic, decades-long problem. On November 7, 1991, basketball superstar Magic Johnson announced he was HIV-positive,

⁸² Ibid., 198.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Singhal and Rogers, *Combating AIDS*, 83.

⁸⁵ Rogers, Dearing, and Chang, "AIDS in the 1980s," 13.

⁸⁶ "The Kaiser Daily HIV/AIDS Report."

⁸⁷ Dirk Johnson, "Ryan White Dies of AIDS at 18; His Struggle Helped Pierce Myths," *New York Times*, April 9, 1990, accessed August 18, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/04/09/obituaries/ryan-white-dies-of-aids-at-18-his-struggle-helped-pierce-myths.html?ref=dirkjohnson>

the result of his admitted promiscuous heterosexual lifestyle. He was the first African American celebrity to disclose his HIV-positive status, and subsequent anxieties developed among heterosexuals. The *Times* devoted three hundred column inches of news space to his story from November 8 to 10, 1991.⁸⁸

The national AIDS hotline was inundated with phone calls after his announcement. It was an example of how a celebrity, through disclosure of his personal life experiences, can influence the agenda-setting process.⁸⁹ A 1995 study by communications scholars William Brown and Michael Basil found that individuals who were emotionally connected with Johnson, such as those who thought of him as a friend or as a personal role model, were led by his announcement to an increased personal concern about AIDS and an intention to reduce their own high-risk sexual behaviors.⁹⁰ Had Johnson not been so popular and well liked, the public's involvement with him would have been much less, and his potential for inducing such behaviors as information seeking and risk reduction would have not been so great.⁹¹

Because of their position in the public eye, celebrities have the power to promote preventive health behavior. But relatively few have done so. Johnson has been an outspoken champion for the issue of AIDS. He helped Americans understand the difference between HIV and AIDS and that the virus could be transmitted heterosexually.

⁸⁸ Singhal and Rogers, *Combating AIDS*, 91.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

He disclosed intimate details about his personal sexual behavior to emphasize these critical points.⁹²

In recent years, media coverage of AIDS has declined in number and length of published stories.⁹³ New stories are waning because of advancements in treatment and prevention, and the topic has become institutionalized and a normalized part of the social-ecological context.⁹⁴ From 1993 to 2013, there was a significant decline in coverage of AIDS by the mainstream press. General coverage of AIDS peaked in June 1993, when 840 stories appeared in one month in Associated Press wire stories and 24 of the 40 newspapers with the highest U.S. circulations.⁹⁵ During this period, AIDS stories were regularly framed as human interest pieces that highlighted individual stories of infection. Stories often highlighted infection through non-risky behavior, such as mother-to-child transmissions and transmission from blood transfusions.⁹⁶

Some argue that fatigue in the media's coverage of AIDS has in fact occurred, as evidenced not only by a decline in the total number of stories over time, but also by the decreased reporting on the domestic epidemic vis-à-vis the world's infection rates. This decline coincided with a change in the nature of AIDS in the U.S. from a death sentence to a chronic disease that more people live with and manage day to day. Others might argue that this does not amount to AIDS fatigue, and in fact it is the usual and customary

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Brodie, et.al, "AIDS at 21: Media Coverage of the AIDS Epidemic: 1981-2002," S1-S8.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Stevens and Hull, "The Colour of AIDS," 354.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

news practice to focus on other things when an epidemic switches to a global focus, when there are no major new developments in terms of vaccines and treatment, and when the epidemic affects a small and increasingly marginalized population in the U.S.⁹⁷

Method

This study is a historical analysis of print media coverage of Ryan White over the course of his five years in the public eye. Instead of a broad analysis of White's impact on AIDS coverage, this study delves deeper into the history of how his story unfolded. The analysis presented over the next two chapters builds upon the previous literature through a thorough reading and textual analysis of all articles on White published between 1985 and 1990 from a relevant selection of both local and national newspapers and magazines. This selection includes the largest, geographically pertinent local newspapers that covered White's story extensively (*Kokomo Tribune*, *Indianapolis Star*, and *Indianapolis News*), and the largest locally distributed magazine, *Indianapolis Monthly*. This selection also includes three major national newspapers (*New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *USA Today*), and one nationally distributed magazine, *People*, all of which covered White. In addition to having covered White, the *Times* was selected because it is considered the "newspaper of record" in the U.S. The *Post* was selected because of its location in the U.S. capital, and AIDS increasingly became a political and federal government issue during White's era. *USA Today* was selected because of its extensive coverage of stories from across the nation, including White's; for the same

⁹⁷ Brodie, et.al, "AIDS at 21: Media Coverage of the AIDS Epidemic: 1981-2002," S1-S8.

reason, *People* was selected because it covered White extensively, including its three cover stories on him from 1985 to 1990.

To find these articles, this study utilized the following databases: Lexis Nexis® *Academic* database; website databases for each selected publication; Kokomo-Howard County Public Library System; Howard County, Indiana, Memory Project; and Indianapolis Newspapers Database. All searches were conducted for articles between January 1, 1985 and December 31, 1990, using keywords such as “Ryan White,” “AIDS,” “Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome,” and “Jeanne White.”

Print media publications were chosen for analysis in this study because, particularly during White’s era, print media often sets the agenda for other news media as well as for the public.⁹⁸ Print media are major sources of news about AIDS.⁹⁹ Therefore, the decision to use print media instead of broadcast media is due to its influence and depth of reporting and content.

For ease of comparing the coverage of White in the local and national press, this research is divided chronologically according to stages and key events in White’s story. The groupings used throughout this research are:

- 1985 – 1986: The Fight to Attend School
- 1987 – 1989: An Emerging Advocate
- 1990: His Final Days

Included in this study are excerpts from oral history interviews conducted by the author and first-hand accounts of some of the journalists who covered White for these

⁹⁸ Stevens and Hull, “The Colour of AIDS,” 363.

⁹⁹ Nelkin, “AIDS and the News Media,” 294.

publications. First-hand accounts in this study include: John Wiles, who was managing editor at the time for the *Tribune*; Mark Nichols, a reporter who wrote several stories on White for the *Star*; Nelson Price, a reporter who covered White for the *News*; and photojournalist Taro Yamasaki of *People*. An interview also was conducted with White's mother, Jeanne White-Ginder. The information gained through these first-hand accounts supplements the basic textual analysis through an investigation of common issues affecting the paper, the journalists' roles, and the effects of these journalists on the local and national understanding of AIDS at the time.

CHAPTER 3: LOCAL PRINT MEDIA COVERAGE

Ryan White's story began and grew with the local media, especially the local print media. Therefore, three local newspapers and one local magazine are examined in this chapter. The local newspapers are his hometown daily paper, the *Kokomo Tribune*, and two newspapers fifty miles south of Kokomo in Indianapolis, the *Indianapolis Star* and *Indianapolis News*. The local magazine is *Indianapolis Monthly*, which was and is the preeminent magazine in the Indianapolis market and the only local magazine to do multiple features on White.

The focus on local news coverage provides insight into the role news plays at the community rather than regional or national level. Local newspapers and magazines analyzed in this study had published few articles pertaining to AIDS before White's story became public. For example, the *Tribune* had not devoted a single article about the epidemic, while the *Star* and the *News* had only devoted a combined five articles. Using the search terms "Ryan White," "AIDS," and "Jeanne White," the *Tribune* featured 205 articles on White¹ from 1985 to 1990; using the search terms "Ryan White" and "Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome," the *Star* had sixty-nine articles and the *News* had twenty-seven total articles during the same time period.² Using the search term, "Ryan White," the *Monthly* had four feature articles during this period.³ Different search

¹ Index, *Kokomo Tribune*, 1985 to 1990. Kokomo-Howard County Public Library, accessed February 17, 2008, <http://www.kokomo.lib.in.us/ayasd/newspaperIndex.html>

² Index, *Indianapolis Star* and *Indianapolis News*, 1985 to 1990. Indianapolis Newspapers Database, 1848-1991, accessed February 17, 2008, http://208.119.135.17/db/indpls_news_1848_1991/1848_1991_results.asp

³ Index, *Indianapolis Monthly*, 1985 to 1990. Kokomo-Howard County Public Library, accessed June 17, 2008, <http://www.kokomo.lib.in.us/glhs/databases/ryanwht.html>

terms were used for these publications based on the configuration of each database's search engine.

For this study, various aspects of White's story in these local newspapers are analyzed: how the topic of AIDS was represented within White's story, how Kokomo and local residents' supposed fears of White's condition were explored, and how the coverage shifted as White's eventual celebrity and death became the focus in these four publications during the final years of his life.

In addition to examining the articles, interviews were conducted with journalists from these publications, as well as White's mother, Jeanne White-Ginder. Themes touched on through these first-hand accounts include objectivity considerations in covering White, as well as issues of accuracy about the disease and the events surrounding White and his family.

1985-1986: The Fight to Attend School

In early 1985, only thirty-four cases of AIDS were known in Indiana.⁴ Local publications had run few articles pertaining to AIDS by this time. However, an article appeared in early spring of 1985 that would eventually change the way AIDS was portrayed in the local media.

The first article printed about White having AIDS was on March 3, 1985, on page three in the *Tribune*, "Local Youth Faces AIDS." This was printed almost four months after his original diagnosis, and it stated that he "was not cured of the disease, and it was doubtful he ever will be," and that he hoped to return to school in the fall when he was

⁴ Christopher M. MacNeil, "Blood Testing Finds No AIDS," *Kokomo Tribune*, April 7, 1985.

feeling better.⁵ The article also attempted to touch on characteristics of the disease, which Jeanne White explained to reporter Steve Marchand:

I went into the room with the doctor and with a minister and we told him he had AIDS and what it meant. . . . [T]he doctor said that the only way that they know AIDS can be spread is through the blood or through contact with semen. As long as his blood doesn't mix with anyone else's, and there is no sexual contact, then there is no problem.⁶

The end of the article gave information about a foundation set up by Jeanne's coworkers at Delco Electronics Division in Kokomo for people to donate money in order to help the White family cover the costs of White's treatment.⁷ John Wiles, who was the managing editor at the time for the *Tribune*, explained how the paper was able to break the news about his condition. This explanation contradicts the previous report from author James Kinsella in his book, *Covering the Plague*, which said White's condition became known during research on a story about the problem of AIDS-tainted blood within donations used in the Kokomo area.⁸ Wiles said:

Contrary to published reports, the Whites came to us. The *Tribune* was associated with a charitable program called Goodfellows. Ryan was diagnosed with AIDS in December, and Jeanne contacted someone associated with the *Tribune*, wanting to help set up a bank fund to donate to Ryan's medical costs. It was then that we found out about Ryan and were able to give his story and mention the fund.⁹

⁵ Steve Marchand, "Local Youth Faces AIDS," *Kokomo Tribune*, March 3, 1985.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ James Kinsella, *Covering the Plague: AIDS and the American Media* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989): 186.

⁹ John Wiles, telephone interview by Andrew J. Heger, March 6, 2008. Wiles was the managing editor of the *Kokomo Tribune*, which is the top editorial position at that paper, for more than thirty years. He is the director of downtown activities for the Kokomo Downtown Association.

In the months that followed the initial story, there were few articles in the *Tribune* relating to White. However, there was a focus on the subject of AIDS as a result of him contracting the disease from a blood transfusion. *Tribune* reporter Christopher MacNeil wrote two series of articles—in early April and in early May—on blood testing for AIDS in Fort Wayne, which provided blood to Kokomo-area hospitals.

White reappeared in the *Tribune* on July 31, 1985, this time on the front page, in a story that helped shape his legacy. The article by MacNeil informed readers that Western Schools Superintendent James O. Smith had announced that White, who was believed to be the only school-age boy with AIDS in the state, would not be allowed to attend school that fall because of his condition.¹⁰ The article mentioned that Smith’s reasoning behind the decision was “the unknowns and uncertainties [about AIDS] and the inherent fear that it would generate among classmates.”¹¹

News of this decision also reached the *Star*, which ran a similar story on that same day on its front page, which was its first story about White. Mark Nichols, the education reporter for the *Star*, wrote that a State Health Department report had been distributed that recommended that children with AIDS who were well enough should be allowed to attend school. Nichols’ article also contained the first direct quote from White: “I’m pretty upset about it. I’ll miss my friends mostly.”¹² Four days later, an article appeared in the *Star* that told the story of how he had contracted the disease, just as the *Tribune* had

¹⁰ Christopher M. MacNeil, “School Bars Door to Youth with AIDS,” *Kokomo Tribune*, July 31, 1985.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Mark Nichols, “Young AIDS Victim Barred from School,” *Indianapolis Star*, July 31, 1985.

done earlier that year.¹³ Nichols said he never thought White's story would generate the worldwide attention it did, as he said: "the story started out as a civil liberties story in schools, in that there was an argument over whether or not he should be allowed to attend class. We thought maybe we would do a follow up a year later to see how he was doing. As the event unfolded, it took on different levels."¹⁴

The *News*, however, did not cover this story. In 1985, the *Star* and the *News* were owned and published by the same person, Eugene S. Pulliam, but each newsroom operated independently with its own staffs, tradition, and character.¹⁵ The *News* had the smaller staff, and its focus was on the Indianapolis area. The *Star*, on the other hand, was the dominant paper and had more space to focus on developing issues outside the area, like White's story.¹⁶

On August 2, 1985, the *Tribune* published its first editorial on the issue, headlined "Every Right." Written by Wiles, it quoted the state health board's recommendation that children with AIDS be allowed in the classroom and listed the precautions the schools could take to minimize risk of exposure:

The decision made by [Western Schools Corporation superintendent James O.] Smith is understandable. An untreatable disease causes fear. Before more was known, those with handicaps, epilepsy and cancer received similar treatment. But the decision to ban Ryan from school should be reconsidered. He has every right

¹³ Bonnie Britton, "His Family's Perplexing Question: Why Ryan?," *Indianapolis Star*, August 4, 1985.

¹⁴ Mark Nichols, telephone interview by Andrew J. Heger, March 4, 2008. Nichols is still employed by the *Indianapolis Star* as its Computer-Assisted Reporting Coordinator.

¹⁵ Indianapolis Star, "A History of the *Indianapolis Star*," accessed March 2, 2008, <http://www2.indystar.com/library/factfiles/star/history/history.html>. According to this history, the *News* folded in 1999 due to decreasing circulation and the decline of the afternoon newspaper across the country.

¹⁶ Nelson Price, telephone interview by Andrew J. Heger, March 2, 2008. Price is an Indianapolis-based author, journalist, and historian who covered White for the *Indianapolis News*.

to attend. Any other decision just further punishes the child for a situation over which he has no control.

In Kinsella's book, *Covering the Plague*, the author said the only response to this editorial was "a spate of letters from angry readers."¹⁷

On August 8, 1985, Jeanne White filed a lawsuit with the U.S. District Court in Indianapolis against Western School Corporation that sought to get White admitted to his school.¹⁸ Both the *Tribune* and the *Star* covered the filing, which began a court battle between the Whites and the Western school board. This lasted for almost a year and made White the focus of intense local media coverage, especially in the pages of the *Tribune*. Wiles said: "There wasn't much controversy during the first few months after Ryan went public with his disease. Then, the school banned Ryan, and his family, in turn, filed a lawsuit. That is when the media circus started."¹⁹

Kokomo was beginning to feel self-conscious, and with good reason. On August 25, 1985, MacNeil reported on the national coverage. "Western School Board President Daniel Carter has observed the Ryan White AIDS case has all the makings of 'sensational' news," wrote MacNeil. "Some [local residents] said the press reported the case as accurately and objectively as it could, considering what isn't known about the disease. Many others said the media entered the case convinced of who was right and

¹⁷ James Kinsella, *Covering the Plague*, 188.

¹⁸ "A Timeline of Key Events in Ryan's Life," RyanWhite.com, accessed February 24, 2008, <http://www.ryanwhite.com/pages/story.html>

¹⁹ Wiles telephone interview.

wrong, and refused to be moved by the facts.” Indeed, the consensus was that Kokomo was not getting a fair shake.²⁰

For the remainder of 1985 through the end of 1986, White was the focus of 155 articles in the *Tribune*, including 117 articles directly relating to his legal battle. In addition, there were articles about White that involved AIDS and his health, the effects of his case on the community, and his growing “celebrity” status. There also were fourteen sections devoted to public opinion letters about his situation.²¹

Coverage of White was much less in both the *Star* and the *News* and tended to specifically focus on the major hard news involving his legal issues. From August 1985 to the end of 1986, the *Star* featured twenty-three stories about White, while the *News* featured just eight stories,²² with its first appearing on August 16, 1985. Three of those eight stories were from the Associated Press. Jeanne White-Ginder (she married former neighbor Roy Ginder in 1992) said the Indianapolis media definitely approached White’s case more from the hard news side and with main stories because they were not close to White like the Kokomo media were at the time.²³

Early on in the Whites’ fight for Ryan to go to school, the local newspapers not only focused on the legal proceedings and his forced home-learning via telephone, they

²⁰ James Kinsella, *Covering the Plague*, 189.

²¹ Index, *Kokomo Tribune*, 1985 to 1990. See “Ryan White,” “AIDS,” and “Jeanne White,” Kokomo-Howard County Public Library, accessed February 17, 2008, <http://www.kokomo.lib.in.us/ayasd/newspaperIndex.html>

²² Index, *Indianapolis Star* and *Indianapolis News*, 1985 to 1990. See “Ryan White” and “Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome,” Indianapolis Newspapers Database, 1848-1991, accessed February 17, 2008, http://208.119.135.17/db/indpls_news_1848_1991/1848_1991_results.asp

²³ Jeanne White-Ginder, telephone interview by Andrew J. Heger, March 5, 2008. Jeanne is Ryan White’s mother.

also focused on the debate over AIDS. The *Tribune* asked local residents what they thought about Western School Corporation's decision to ban White, and four out of six people who responded to the newspaper stated they thought that he should be allowed to attend school, as long as precaution was taken.²⁴ Also, the *Tribune* featured several opinions, both for and against White, from its readers. At the same time, articles about debates over the issue among parents of Western students began to appear in the *Tribune*.

An article on August 13, 1985, was about an "emotional"²⁵ meeting with parents and school officials. Western Teachers Association President Paula Adair stated that she had contacted the CDC and felt its information was "inconclusive just like everyone else's." Dr. Jeffrey Squires, a local pathologist who was at the meeting, said he could not guarantee that their children could not contract AIDS by helping White.²⁶ Looking back on the AIDS debate reported in the *Tribune*, White-Ginder said:

I thought the *Tribune* did a fair shake on the issue. I know the *Tribune* felt they had to get both sides of the story. It was so controversial to discuss AIDS at the time, so I could understand the parents' initial fears. People didn't want to hear the CDC and others telling them what to do. All of these doctors were not really informed unless they were infectious disease doctors.²⁷

Wiles said that even though the *Tribune* supported White editorially, it tried to present both sides of the story, whether it was the opinions of the school community in nearby Russiaville or the people of Kokomo:

Our goal was to present an objective account of this case. Our goal wasn't to take a slant. We ended up supporting Ryan going to school because of our own

²⁴ "KT Streettalk: Do You Agree with Western's Rule Barring an AIDS Pupil?," *Kokomo Tribune*, August 12, 1985.

²⁵ Kay Bacon, "Worried Parents Attend Meeting," *Kokomo Tribune*, August 13, 1985.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ White-Ginder telephone interview.

research we did. It was a difficult decision because there were still a lot of precautions people had to take because no one from the CDC would guarantee anything. But our editorial stance never wavered that White should be allowed to go to school, and as a result, the *Tribune* suffered no loss of subscribers.²⁸

According to Nichols, the little information known about the disease at the time became a big part of most of the stories that the *Star* filed during coverage of the Whites' legal battle:

Ryan's story kind of snowballed because of the public misunderstanding about AIDS itself. The medical writers on staff researched what was available on the disease at the time. AIDS was such a new disease at that point, so a lot of what was written was anecdotal. The medical writers would talk to doctors who could only give their informed opinion.²⁹

In late 1985, the *Star* attempted to inform readers, in articles about the Whites' legal battles, about the disease and how state health officials viewed it. In an article on August 24, 1985, about White's phone hookup to his school classroom, there was a statement from Indiana State Health Commissioner Woodrow Myers: "Ryan is capable of attending school and his condition does not threaten other pupils because there is no evidence that AIDS is transmitted by casual contact." Also, in the article, there was the mention that "high risk groups include homosexuals, hemophiliacs, and intravenous drug users."³⁰ This statement helped advance the disease beyond the purely gay stigma it once had. However, in an October 3, 1985, interview with the *Star*, Western Middle School Principal Ron Colby urged White to continue with learning from home:

In the best interest of all concerned I feel Ryan should remain in a homebound program of instruction. The risk of spreading AIDS, as far as we know today, is

²⁸ Scott Smith, "The Year the Media Came to Town," *Kokomo Tribune*, September 25, 2006.

²⁹ Nichols telephone interview.

³⁰ "AIDS Victim has Phone Hookup to School," *Indianapolis Star*, August 24, 1985.

still a risk and the consequences are catastrophic. We need to know more about AIDS before Western requires students to come into even casual contact with a person known to suffer from this illness.³¹

In late 1985 and into 1986, as national and international attention toward White grew and the family started receiving trips to Rome and New York to attend AIDS benefits, there was a characterization of Jeanne White as a mother who vicariously enjoyed the attention given to her child. However, an April 22, 1986, article written by *News* reporter Nelson Price, headlined “Ryan White: Calling His Own Shots,” gave Indianapolis readers its first in-depth look at the White family and their everyday lives.³²

Price came up with the idea to do such a piece on his own and had free rein from his editors at the *News*.³³ While writing the article, he observed:

Ryan was the one making all the decisions, which wasn’t what people perceived at time. He was just a normal kid who played with G.I. Joes and read comics. He had such drive and determination and just wanted to go to school and get to play with his friends and other kids. You could relate to this kid so easily.³⁴

In mid-1986, issues of objectivity toward covering the Whites came up at the *Tribune*. On May 1, MacNeil wrote his final story involving White and his family. Wiles was forced to pull MacNeil from covering them when he was caught on television cameras hugging both Ryan and Jeanne, which Wiles interpreted as a loss of journalistic detachment. Wiles said it was a tough decision to make since he had been on the story from the beginning:

³¹ “AIDS Victim is Urged to Study at Home,” *Indianapolis Star*, October 3, 1985.

³² Nelson Price, “Ryan White: Calling His Own Shots,” *Indianapolis News*, April 22, 1986.

³³ Price telephone interview.

³⁴ Ibid.

People started calling the *Tribune* and informed me that they had seen MacNeil publicly hugging both Ryan and Jeanne. I warned Chris that if he did it again, that I would have to pull him from the story. Sure enough, when the Whites returned from a trip for a broadcast on AIDS, MacNeil was caught doing it again. It was a sensitive issue for us, so I took him off the story.³⁵

MacNeil later stated, “I had a lot of problems [for befriending White]. I was called a [homosexual pejorative]. People even said I must have been having an affair with his mother.”³⁶

It also was at this time that White started being featured in the *Indianapolis Monthly*. In fact, for its July 1986 issue, the *Monthly* ran its first feature-length article on White. Written by Steve Bell and titled “Look Back in Anger,” the article explored the tensions caused in Kokomo by White’s disease and legal battle against Western Schools Corporation. It also reflected on Jeanne’s back story and initial reaction to her son’s diagnosis, and her own lack of knowledge about AIDS. In the article, Jeanne said: “I didn’t know anything about AIDS except for that it was a disease of homosexuals, and they had said some hemophiliacs got it. I knew everyone died from it.”³⁷ The story also mentioned the hardships faced by MacNeil (his name was misspelled in the article as “MacNeal”). He discussed his struggles with Bell:

As a result of this case, I feel like I’ve lost a home, because in the place you call home people don’t call you up in your apartment and threaten to kill you. People don’t accuse you of sleeping with the mother of an AIDS patient, and the chairman of the Indiana Civil Liberties gay task force, and everyone else between Kokomo and Indianapolis.³⁸

³⁵ Wiles telephone interview.

³⁶ Beverly Beyette, “Ryan’s Hope – Legacy: Through his extraordinary courage, an ordinary young boy inspired thousands of AIDS sufferers and taught a nation some lessons in compassion,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 10, 1990.

³⁷ Steve Bell, “Look Back in Anger,” *Indianapolis Monthly*, July 1, 1986, 55.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 56.

This article also interviewed Kokomo residents, including popular radio personality Dick Bronson, about what they felt was the unfair perception of Kokomo's treatment of the White family in the local and national media. Local resident Mitzi Johnson, who opposed the idea that White should be allowed to return to Western Middle School, said: "We're humans. We have compassion for her because that's her son. And I can't imagine feeling what she feels. But I don't want to feel it. . . . Let's be sure first. Let's be safe."³⁹

Bell also explored the controversy surrounding MacNeil's objectivity to the story, recalling, in MacNeil's words, when White started calling him "Uncle" and "Dad." Furthermore, the author discussed the portrayal of Kokomo by national media, even interviewing Indiana University-Kokomo professor of communications Robert Jackson, who said that national reporters assigned to this story tended to always interview "the most overweight, adenoidal little kid." Jackson said this condemned both the child and "by proxy" his family "in the eyes of the viewer." Mitzi Johnson followed up this statement, adding that "now, [residents] won't talk to reporters."⁴⁰

In his article, Bell put White's emerging legacy into a wider perspective, concluding:

[P]hotos won't be Ryan White's only legacy, no matter how strongly some wish to forget him. For good or bad, Ryan White has educated his city, his state, the nation and the world about a horrifying disease. Gazing off magazine covers with Bambi eyes, he has given AIDS a face. People in Kokomo may not like it, but now, at least, they know.⁴¹

³⁹ Ibid., 56.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 57.

⁴¹ Ibid., 104.

On July 18, 1986, the local newspapers, using mostly AP stories, reported that the Western school parents abandoned their legal fight to keep White out of school after the Indiana Court of Appeals dismissed their appeal of a previous ruling. This allowed him to return to Western Middle School as an eighth-grader that fall.⁴² The *Star* named his legal battle against the Western School Corporation its 1986 “Story of the Year.”⁴³ It was not the last time that he would be in the local newspapers. However, after extensive coverage of White by the *Tribune*, the *Star*, and the *News* in 1985 and 1986, all three newspapers had much fewer articles dedicated to him over the next three years.

1987-1989: An Emerging Advocate

With their legal battles behind them and Ryan back at Western Middle School, the Whites were not in the spotlight as they once had been. Things for them, however, were not back to normal. In a February 7, 1987, article on the front page of the *News*, Jeanne White spoke about the obstacles they still faced in their hometown:

We have to deal with parents who are fearful of Ryan attending school. . . . I received a letter that said “I pray to God you will suffer from this someday, and I know you will. . . . [Y]ou are hated in Kokomo.” . . . I have accepted that Ryan has AIDS and we are going to lick it. Ryan is a fighter.⁴⁴

Yet, sick of being hassled and in need of a fresh start, the Whites moved thirty miles south of Kokomo to Cicero, which was first reported in the *Star* on May 1, 1987.⁴⁵

⁴² “Ryan White’s 5-year Battle,” *Indianapolis News*, April 9, 1990.

⁴³ Jep Cadou, “Looking Back: Ryan White’s Legal Battle Selected as Year’s Top Story,” *Indianapolis Star*, December 28, 1986.

⁴⁴ Janet Hastings, “Ryan’s Mom Speaks Out About Fears, Reality of AIDS,” *Indianapolis News*, February 7, 1987.

⁴⁵ Beth L. Rosenberg, “AIDS Victim Plans Move to Cicero,” *Indianapolis Star*, May 1, 1987.

They were able to purchase a new house, thanks to the proceeds from selling the rights to White's story for a future TV movie.⁴⁶ Also at this time, his role as an advocate for AIDS awareness began to grow, and he was befriended by celebrities such as musician Elton John and Olympic diver Greg Louganis.⁴⁷

After the Whites moved, there was a major shift in coverage of White in the *Tribune*. In 1985 and 1986, there were 161 articles about White in the *Tribune*, but in the three years that followed, there were only twenty-eight articles, and only five of those were on the front page.⁴⁸ The topics covered in the *Tribune* were mainly about his appearances and his celebrity, while the coverage of AIDS in relation to him dropped significantly to just two articles.⁴⁹ Even more notable was the switch from using *Tribune* reporters in covering White to the decision to use mostly AP wire stories about him. Wiles explained that he changed the direction of coverage because he had taken MacNeil off the story and decided it would be easier to use AP writers in Indianapolis, since White and his family were more in the Indianapolis coverage area than Kokomo.⁵⁰

During these three years, the *Star* printed twenty articles about White, including seven about his new life in Cicero, while the *Tribune* included only two AP articles about

⁴⁶ Price telephone interview.

⁴⁷ Bob Garrison and Alan Flippen, "White's Speak at AIDS Conference," *Kokomo Tribune*, February 8, 1987.

⁴⁸ Index, *Kokomo Tribune*, 1987 to 1989. See "Ryan White," "AIDS," and "Jeanne White," Kokomo-Howard County Public Library, accessed February 17, 2008, <http://www.kokomo.lib.in.us/ayasd/newspaperIndex.html>

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Wiles telephone interview.

Cicero over these three years. The *News* published only three articles relating to White over this time period, each one regarding his advocacy of AIDS awareness.

The *Star*'s articles on White in Cicero and at his new school, Hamilton Heights High School, portrayed his new surroundings as a place of warmth and acceptance. Students at Hamilton Heights had been educated about AIDS before his arrival and it came across in the articles, as shown in George Esper's October 19, 1987, article:

Classmates buy him cola and chips, bake him chocolate chip cookies, walk him to classes and ask him to ball games and dances. Art students draw sketches for him. Others write poems. They all help him remember to take his medicine. The center of all this attention is Ryan White, the plucky teen-ager who became a nationally known outcast at age 13 because he has AIDS. Now 15 and living in a new town, Ryan says these are the best days of his life.⁵¹

Besides stories on Cicero, the local newspapers devoted a lot of their articles on White discussing his ABC-TV movie, *The Ryan White Story*. The movie starred Judith Light as Jeanne, George C. Scott as the Whites' attorney, Charles Vaughan, and Lukas Haas as Ryan. White even had a small cameo in the film. The first article about the movie in the *Tribune* expressed concerns by local residents about how Kokomo might be portrayed, especially Kokomo Mayor Stephen J. Daily, who stated, "There's no doubt in my mind it's not going to be fair, but quite frankly I am sick of fighting that battle."⁵²

After the movie aired on January 16, 1989, both the *Tribune* and the *Star* covered Kokomo's reaction to the film. The *Tribune* article reported that there were mixed emotions to the movie, stating that several key figures in the legal battle refused

⁵¹ George Esper, "Finding Pals," *Indianapolis Star*, October 18, 1987.

⁵² Associated Press, "'Ryan White Story' to Appear on TV," *Kokomo Tribune*, December 19, 1988.

to watch it.⁵³ The *Star*, on the other hand, reported the movie was received poorly in Kokomo.⁵⁴ The next year, though, the movie would be long forgotten as White fought his toughest battle yet.

In 1989, the *Monthly* ran two feature articles regarding White's health struggles and his family. In its April 1989 issue, the *Monthly* ran a short article titled "Season on the Rink," a play on the title of sportswriter John Feinstein's popular 1986 book, *A Season on the Brink*, about legendary Indiana University men's basketball coach Bob Knight. The story focused on White's sister, Andrea, and her return to figure skating and coming out of her brother's shadow.⁵⁵

However, in its December 1989 issue, the *Monthly* returned its attention to White and how he had achieved hero's status in the face of his grave illness.⁵⁶ Titled "Boy Wonder," the article explored White's transition from local outcast in Kokomo to a hero in just four years. The author, Julia Spalding, even claimed White was one of the "longest-lived people with AIDS."⁵⁷ The article also introduced *Monthly* readers to AZT (azidothymidine), a drug White had been taking for two years to delay development of AIDS. Medical experts quoted in the article said AZT could become analogous to diabetics who take insulin every day.⁵⁸

⁵³ Dave Wiethop, "AIDS Movie Stirs Opposing Emotions," *Kokomo Tribune*, January 17, 1989.

⁵⁴ Scott Miley, "Ryan White Film Flops in Kokomo," *Indianapolis Star*, January 18, 1989.

⁵⁵ Brian D. Smith, "Season on the Rink," *Indianapolis Monthly*, April 1, 1989, 52.

⁵⁶ Julia Spalding, "Boy Wonder," *Indianapolis Monthly*, December 1, 1989, 42.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

The article also mentioned that despite the numerous ailments that had attacked White's immune system during his struggle with AIDS, he and his family remained positive about his future. Spalding even wrote that some local medical experts had begun characterizing AIDS as a "chronic but treatable disease," but not one associated yet with heterosexuals:

As a group, hemophiliacs with AIDS (like Ryan) seem to have an advantage over people who have contracted the virus through intercourse or intravenous drug use. Though researchers have yet to prove it, most doctors believe this occurs because homosexuals and drug users expose themselves to so many other diseases. In such cases, several viruses might work together against the immune system.⁵⁹

1990: His Final Days

Two themes emerged from the coverage of Ryan White in 1990—his heroic battle against the disease and the legacy he left in the wake of his death on April 8, 1990.

The *Tribune* published sixteen articles about White in 1990, seven of which were about his final days and death, eight about the aftermath, and one story about White's New Year's visit to Michael Jackson's California ranch.⁶⁰ For the first time during his public life, the *Star* actually surpassed the *Tribune* that year with twenty-six articles, including fifteen regarding his final days, ten that dealt with his story after he

⁵⁹ Ibid., 46.

⁶⁰ Index, *Kokomo Tribune*, 1990. See "Ryan White," "AIDS," and "Jeanne White," Kokomo-Howard County Public Library, accessed February 17, 2008, <http://www.kokomo.lib.in.us/ayasd/newspaperIndex.html>

died and the same story about White visiting Jackson. The *News* also stepped up its coverage of White's final year with sixteen articles.⁶¹

Local publications were given no direct access to White's family and close friends during his final moments. Instead, reporter Bill Shaw and photojournalist Taro Yamasaki from *People* were the only journalists allowed in White's hospital room in Riley Hospital for Children in Indianapolis during his final days because, as Jeanne said, "Taro became one of Ryan's favorite media people, and he and reporter Bill Shaw did three wonderful stories on Ryan for *People* magazine."⁶²

In White's final days, the *Tribune* published articles that Kokomo wished him the best, and even ran an article about the attorney for the Western School Corporation, David Rosselot, who was "rooting for him."⁶³ The *Tribune* continued to use AP reporters, and not staff reporters, for articles on his death. The lack of in-depth coverage in the *Tribune* was a stark contrast to how his story began, with MacNeil and other *Tribune* reporters almost filing stories daily. Jeanne said she was surprised and disappointed on how little coverage there was in the *Tribune* of his final days and funeral.⁶⁴

The most continuous coverage of White's final days, his death, and his funeral was by the *Star* and the *News*. When he died, the *Star* dedicated most of its front page to

⁶¹ Index, *Indianapolis Star* and *Indianapolis News*, 1985 to 1990. See "Ryan White" and "Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome," Indianapolis Newspapers Database, 1848-1991, accessed February 17, 2008, http://208.119.135.17/db/indpls_news_1848_1991/1848_1991_results.asp

⁶² White-Ginder telephone interview.

⁶³ Kris Kinkade, "Rosselot Is One of Ryan's Big Rooters," *Kokomo Tribune*, April 4, 1990.

⁶⁴ White-Ginder telephone interview.

him, including a large photograph of Michael Jackson consoling Jeanne.⁶⁵ That issue dedicated six stories to White, including stories of his legacy and the people he inspired. On April 12, the *Star* used the entire front page for its funeral coverage, with a prominent, yet solemn, photograph of Jeanne and Elton John saying goodbye to White lying in his open casket.⁶⁶ Other photographs on that day included photos of the 1,500 people who attended the funeral and the massive line of cars entering the church parking lot.⁶⁷ Besides coverage of his death and funeral similar to that of the *Star*, the *News* also did a three-part series called “Remembering Ryan,” that included several photographs from his life.⁶⁸

Covering White’s death was a more-than-somber event for local reporters. Price was at White’s house the day of his death and said, “It was a media circus which felt very surreal. It was almost awkward and ghoulish. I remember that many reporters were hanging around because Michael Jackson was there, and we thought he may have a press conference, but it never happened.”⁶⁹

After White’s death, the *Tribune* continued to produce slim coverage of White. There were three articles throughout the rest of 1990: an article that promoted AIDS funds in his honor, a news brief on a park named in his honor, and a story about his family’s first Christmas without him. As White’s court battle against the Western

⁶⁵ Photograph, *Indianapolis Star*, April 9, 1990.

⁶⁶ Vic Caleca, “Farewell to a Friend,” *Indianapolis Star*, April 12, 1990.

⁶⁷ Photographs, *Indianapolis Star*, April 12, 1990.

⁶⁸ “Remembering Ryan,” *Indianapolis News*, April 12, 1990.

⁶⁹ Price telephone interview.

School Corporation was the *Star*'s 1986 "Story of the Year," his death was named the *Star*'s "Story of the Year" for 1990. The *Star* also published an article on December 6, White's birthday, about his legacy as demonstrated by the numerous mementos that the story said were being placed on his grave.⁷⁰

As with the Indianapolis newspapers, the *Monthly* dedicated more than ten pages of space in its June 1990 issue in tribute to White, including two full-page photos and an essay written by Jeanne. Jeanne described her son as normal kid who wanted to go to school and teach everyone about AIDS so that nobody would have to go through the things he did. She added: "[L]et's face it—the publicity helped him do that. The media made Ryan a hero."⁷¹ She also wrote about how the busy schedule associated with her son's advocacy work, and the dedication of friends such as Elton John, Michael Jackson, and Phil Donahue and his wife, Marlo Thomas, helped them to spread awareness about the disease. She also provided a recap of White's final hours and wrote that her family planned to stay in Cicero because "the whole community has been good to us."⁷²

⁷⁰ George Stuteville, "The Legacy of Ryan White," *Indianapolis Star*, December 6, 1990.

⁷¹ Jeanne White with Beverly K. Bell, "Jeanne White Remembers . . .," *Indianapolis Monthly*, June 1, 1990, 83.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 163.

CHAPTER 4: NATIONAL PRINT MEDIA COVERAGE

Although Ryan White's story began and grew with the local media, he also remained a fixture in the national media for five years. This chapter examines national print media coverage of Ryan White during those five years, from 1985 to 1990. Print media sources analyzed in this chapter are the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, *Washington Post*, and *People*.

Unlike the local media included in this study, the national media had covered AIDS in the United States from the beginning of the epidemic. In addition to looking at how the national print media portrayed White, a portion of this chapter also explores the controversy surrounding the way Kokomo was negatively portrayed in the national media. This section allows the reader to better understand the reporting decisions being made by the national media in order to cover White.

It also could be assumed that White's situation presented a different and perhaps ignored element to the epidemic—that AIDS was more than just a disease associated with homosexuals and intravenous drug users. Since White was a young boy with hemophilia who contracted AIDS through a tainted blood transfusion, this chapter analyzes how White was characterized in the national media, which researchers suggest initially had difficulty covering AIDS when it was considered a “gay disease.”¹

¹ Arvind Singhal and Everett M. Rogers, *Combating AIDS: Communication Strategies in Action*, (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2003): 84.

In searching the keyword “Ryan White” on Lexis Nexis® *Academic*, the *Times* published forty-three articles and editorials featuring White from 1985 to 1990.² He also was featured prominently in the *Post* (forty-one articles and editorials using the search term “Ryan White” on Lexis Nexis® *Academic*)³ and *USA Today* (eighty-four articles and editorials using the search term “Ryan White” on both NewsBank® and the Howard County, Indiana, Memory Project databases).⁴ White became an unofficial “poster child” for AIDS through his appearance in national magazines such as *People*, which alone had him on the cover three times during these five years.⁵

In particular, as noted in the previous chapter, White and his family developed a strong relationship with *People*, especially reporter Bill Shaw and photojournalist Taro Yamasaki, and gave them exclusive access to Ryan at the end of his life.⁶

As in the previous chapter, different aspects of White’s story in these national publications will be analyzed: how the topic of AIDS was represented within White’s story, how Kokomo and local concerns over White’s condition were explored, and how the coverage shifted as White’s eventual celebrity and death became the media’s focus in

² Index, *New York Times*, 1985 to 1990. See under “Ryan White,” Lexis Nexis® *Academic* database, accessed September 6, 2013, <http://www.lexisnexis.com.proxy.library.ohiou.edu/>

³ Index, *Washington Post*, 1985 to 1990. See under “Ryan White,” Lexis Nexis® *Academic* database, accessed September 6, 2013, <http://www.lexisnexis.com.proxy.library.ohiou.edu/>

⁴ Index, *USA Today*, 1985 to 1990. See under “Ryan White,” NewsBank®, accessed September 6, 2013, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.proxy.library.ohiou.edu/>; Howard County, Indiana, Memory Project, accessed September 6, 2013, <http://www.howardcountymemory.net>. *USA Today*’s own online database only retrieves articles from 1987-2013, and Lexis Nexis® *Academic* only retrieves articles from 1989-2013. Therefore, I used the other two databases due to their ability to retrieve articles consistently from 1985 to 1990.

⁵ “Ryan’s Story,” RyanWhite.com, accessed February 24, 2008, <http://www.ryanwhite.com/pages/story.html>

⁶ Jeanne White-Ginder, telephone interview by Andrew J. Heger, March 5, 2008. Jeanne is Ryan White’s mother.

the final years of his life. In addition, interviews and first-hand accounts of White's story also are included in this chapter.

1985-1986: The Fight to Attend School

Unlike local newspapers, national newspapers had already published several articles pertaining to AIDS by this time. During this period, the *Times* and *Post* had the most coverage of White from the group of publications studied, publishing twenty-one and twenty-two articles featuring White, respectively.⁷ Most of this coverage focused on the Whites' legal battles against the Western School Corporation, which had banned him from school. *People* did not feature White in any articles until 1987.

Of the four national publications analyzed for this study, White was first mentioned on August 1, 1985, in the *Times* and *USA Today*. These articles were printed almost five months after he first appeared in the pages of the *Kokomo Tribune*. The *Times* ran a brief AP photo caption titled, "AIDS Victim Kept from School in Indiana," which appeared on page A-15. The photo showed White in his bedroom in Kokomo. The caption stated that he "was barred from returning to Western Middle School for fear he might pose a health threat to other pupils."⁸ *USA Today* took a different approach and used White as the main example for a cover story on experts who claimed that a "highly successful test" was making the U.S. blood supply safe from the AIDS virus. This story suggested that such a test came too late for White but would save other children. It also

⁷ Index, *New York Times*, 1985 to 1990. See under "Ryan White," Lexis Nexis® *Academic* database, accessed September 6, 2013, <http://www.lexisnexis.com.proxy.library.ohiou.edu/>; Index, *Washington Post*, 1985 to 1990. See under "Ryan White," Lexis Nexis® *Academic* database, accessed September 6, 2013, <http://www.lexisnexis.com.proxy.library.ohiou.edu/>

⁸ Associated Press, "AIDS Victim Kept from School in Indiana," *New York Times*, August 1, 1985.

detailed how White was barred from class despite recommendations from the Indiana Board of Health that school-aged AIDS patients be allowed to go to school. The story included a quote from White saying that he thought “they should let me go to school. . . . [T]he doctors said I could.” It also included reaction from two of White’s classmates.⁹ They were quoted as saying that he should be allowed to attend.

On August 2, 1985, White first appeared, albeit briefly, in the *Post*. He was mentioned in a page A-14 article by Michael Specter on how AIDS had brought fear, bias, and discrimination against its victims. White’s ban from attending school over fear of infecting classmates was one of four examples of discrimination against AIDS patients cited in the article. The article’s lead paragraph stated: “Not since the 1950’s, when polio threatened a generation, has a disease caused as much fear and uncertainty in the United States as AIDS.”¹⁰

On August 25, 1985, in its second AP news item on White, the *Times* became the first of these publications to mention information on AIDS transmission in regards to White. The article, which focused on White’s first day “attending” school via telephone hookup, stated: “The disease can apparently be spread by sexual contact, contaminated needles and blood transfusions, but there is no evidence it is spread by casual contact.”¹¹

In late 1985, as White’s family endured a legal battle to allow him to attend Western Middle School, the national—and even international—media started to become more involved in the story. The *Times*, *Post*, and *USA Today* had started out mostly

⁹ Denise Kalette, Mark Spearman, and Steven Findley, “New Testing Would Save Other Kids,” *USA Today*, August 1, 1985.

¹⁰ Michael Specter, “Disease Brings Fear, Bias Against AIDS Victims; Others Needlessly Refuse to Associate with Patients, Say Civil Rights, Gay Groups,” *Washington Post*, August 2, 1985.

¹¹ Associated Press, “Boy With AIDS to Get Schooling by Telephone,” *New York Times*, August 24, 1985.

publishing short wire stories about White's situation, but they began running features assigned to staff reporters on his struggles for acceptance within his school and in his community. This mostly contradicted the local publications' attempt to keep its reader attuned to the legal aspect of White's story. The first of these national publications to run a story solely dedicated to White—that also included one of its reporters in the byline—was the *Post*. In his September 3, 1985, article, “AIDS Victim's Right to Attend Public School Tested in Corn Belt,” Specter wrote that White was “apparently the first case of an AIDS victim trying to force a school system to admit him.”¹² This article not only provided quotes from White, his mother, and their lawyer, Charles Vaughan, but also provided information from the CDC that “there is no evidence that school-aged children such as Ryan can spread the disease through casual contact.”¹³ This mirrored what the *Times* had reported about the disease about a week earlier. The article also exposed readers at a national level to those parents who were opposed to White attending, including Kokomo's Mitzi Johnson, who said: “The big doctors and the government officials don't give a damn about our children. I don't want to hurt that boy any more than he has been, but my daughter is never going to school with someone I know has AIDS.”¹⁴

Indianapolis Star reporter Mark Nichols stated that the local media had concerns about the arrival of the national media at first:

¹² Michael Specter, “AIDS Victim's Right to Attend Public School Tested in Corn Belt,” *Washington Post*, September 3, 1985.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Obviously there was concern from a community perspective and their image as the story grew. There weren't people there day in and day out but more outside media was coming in and getting their five-second sound bites. We felt as the local media, we got to know the family a little better. When you had the national media, like the *Times*, coming in, you made sure that you didn't want to lose stories in your own back yard. It was a competitive story to cover, but we had the advantage of being there full time and dealing with it from the beginning.”¹⁵

On September 8, 1985, the *Times* ran an article about three triplets with AIDS whom Miami, Florida, school officials had decided the previous year to educate in a separate facility. The article stated that it was “the first time one of the nation’s school systems had confronted the issue of school-aged children with AIDS.”¹⁶ However, in the same article—which discussed White’s ban from school as well as similar bans in Queens, New York (where reportedly parents of 12,000 public school pupils kept their children at home to protest the admission of a second-grader with AIDS to school)¹⁷; Connecticut; New Jersey; and California—Indiana was singled out. The article quoted the physician of a Massachusetts boy with AIDS who was allowed to attend his school: “It’s appalling, what happened in Indiana. It was based on misinformation and fear.”¹⁸

On the same day, the *Post* ran an editorial by Washington neurologist Dr. Richard Restak, who had studied AIDS. In his piece, Dr. Restak argued that AIDS was a “medical issue” and not a “civil rights issue,” and that White’s defense was based on CDC information that AIDS was not “highly contagious,” but that release of any blood,

¹⁵ Mark Nichols, telephone interview by Andrew J. Heger, March 4, 2008. Nichols is still employed by the Indianapolis Star as its Computer-Assisted Reporting Coordinator.

¹⁶ Dudley Clendinen, “Schools in New York Will Admit an AIDS Pupil But Not 3 Others,” *New York Times*, September 8, 1985.

¹⁷ Mary McGrory, “The Spread of Fear,” *Washington Post*, September 17, 1985.

¹⁸ Ibid.

vomit, or diarrhea in a classroom setting could “arouse some concern about transmission of the virus.”¹⁹ In *USA Today*’s September 18, 1985, article, “AIDS Victim ‘Just Like Any Boy His Age,’” reporter M.G. Ramey included a perspective missing from most of the articles around this time about White—support from a Kokomo resident: “Some residents like Dave Coose welcome Ryan with open arms. ‘He’s just like any other boy his age,’ says Coose, who sells comic books to Ryan at Kokomo Comics.”²⁰

White returned to the national media spotlight in February 1986, as a result of his one-day return to school before an injunction by a Howard County judge later that day again banned him from attending school. In James Barron’s *Times* article on February 22, 1986, “AIDS Sufferer’s Return to Classes Cut Short,” he reported that 43 percent of White’s classmates were absent upon his return to school on February 21, up from the 10 to 15 percent range that the school had experienced over the previous two weeks. In the article, Barron also explained a possible reason as to why White had received so much media attention: “Although Ryan is not the only AIDS victim to return to school, his case is unusual because he and his mother made a public issue of it. In similar cases in other school districts, the names of the pupils have not been disclosed.”²¹ The article also painted a different picture of the local community’s reaction to White than the one previously portrayed in the media. Barron reported that White’s teachers said “there was none of the anger and anxiety that has polarized the

¹⁹ Richard Restak, “Worry About Survival of Society First; Then AIDS Victims’ Rights,” *Washington Post*, September 8, 1985.

²⁰ M.G. Ramey, “AIDS Victim ‘Just Like Any Boy His Age,’” *USA Today*, September 18, 1985.

²¹ James Barron, “AIDS Sufferer’s Return to Class is Cut Short,” *New York Times*, February 22, 1986.

community in recent months.” White was even quoted as saying his fellow students treated him “just like everybody else.”²² *USA Today* chose to focus on skeptical parents for its article on White’s return.²³

When the injunction barring White from school was thrown out in April 1986, allowing him to once again return to classes, there were conflicting reports about the school’s reaction to the decision. The *Post* reported that fifty-three students stayed home as a result,²⁴ while the *Times* and *USA Today* said twenty-seven²⁵ and twenty-nine,²⁶ respectively.

There were other inconsistencies within some of the national stories during this time, such as Barron’s February 22, 1986, *Times* article. In the article, he reported that White currently had a stepfather, which was completely untrue.²⁷ More controversial in the national coverage of White was the misperception of Kokomo’s involvement in the White’s legal battles. Several national sources, including the ones analyzed for this study, many times failed to mention that Western Schools were in Russiaville, about fifteen miles from Kokomo, and instead claimed it was the Kokomo school system that was barring him. Nelson Price, a reporter for *The News*, added:

During Ryan’s story, Kokomo was not coming off well in the media. There was a temptation to call Western a Kokomo school, and it was hard to make it very,

²² Ibid.

²³ Cheryl Mattox Berry, “AIDS Victim’s Return to Class Resisted,” *USA Today*, February 21, 1986.

²⁴ Addenda, *Washington Post*, April 12, 1986.

²⁵ United Press International, “Indiana Judge Allows AIDS Victim Back Into School,” *New York Times*, April 11, 1986.

²⁶ Mary Kaull, “Teen AIDS Victim Returns to School; Lawyers to Appeal,” *USA Today*, April 11, 1986.

²⁷ Ibid.

very clear that it was in Russiaville. The local newspapers succeeded in doing so in its datelines, whereas the national media struggled to distinguish the two towns.²⁸

Also, Kokomo's nickname was scrutinized by at least one member of the national media. In Specter's September 3, 1985, *Post* article, he wrote: "Despite recent guidelines issued by the state of Indiana and the CDC, the citizens of Kokomo, which calls itself the 'City of Firsts,' refuse to have White in school. Several neighbors, upset that he retains his newspaper route, have canceled their subscriptions to the *Tribune*."²⁹ According to John Wiles, the *Tribune's* managing editor at the time, this information was inaccurate.³⁰ The article also tended to generalize the reaction of Kokomo to White: "But somehow [White] has managed to maintain a composure that most of the adults in town lost weeks ago."³¹

These inaccuracies by the national media were not treated lightly by members of the *Tribune* and the Kokomo community. Wiles said: "I feel that the national media didn't want the facts to get in the way of a good story."³² Stephen J. Daily, who was mayor of Kokomo at the time, said not only was the Kokomo school system designation

²⁸ Nelson Price, telephone interview by Andrew J. Heger, March 2, 2008. Price is an Indianapolis-based author, journalist, and historian who covered White for the *Indianapolis News*.

²⁹ Specter, "AIDS Victim's Right to Attend Public School Tested in Corn Belt."

³⁰ John Wiles, telephone interview by Andrew J. Heger, March 6, 2008. Wiles was the managing editor of the *Kokomo Tribune*, which is the top editorial position at that paper, for more than thirty years. He is the director of downtown activities for the Kokomo Downtown Association.

³¹ Specter, "AIDS Victim's Right to Attend Public School Tested in Corn Belt."

³² Wiles telephone interview.

inaccurate, but Western School Corporation was “unfairly singled out since school systems across the state and country were developing similar policies.”³³

Another, perhaps less obvious, discrepancy found in the analysis of these articles involved the references to White in their headlines during these two years. The *Times*, *Post*, and *USA Today* referred to White as an “AIDS Victim” fifteen times and “Boy with AIDS” six times. However, to the disdain of some readers,³⁴ they also referred to him as “AIDS Boy” five times. This was due to, perhaps, a lack of a consistent reporter covering White for these publications, which relied heavily on the AP, UPI, and other wire services in their coverage.

1987-1989: An Emerging Advocate

With their legal battles behind them, the Whites were not in the spotlight as they once had been. As with the local newspapers, the national newspapers also stopped covering White extensively during this time. The *Times* had only seven articles featuring White, with most discussing his smooth transition to Cicero.³⁵ The *Post* had about the same amount of coverage with eight articles,³⁶ and like the *Times*, discussed his move to Cicero after “he fled the boycotts by his former classmates in Kokomo.”³⁷ Wiles

³³ Associated Press, “Kokomo Wants to Better Image with AIDS Research Fund Drive,” *Indianapolis Star*, March 17, 1986.

³⁴ “Letterline,” *USA Today*, September 23, 1987.

³⁵ Index, *New York Times*, 1987 to 1989. See under “Ryan White,” Lexis Nexis® *Academic* database, accessed September 6, 2013, <http://www.lexisnexis.com.proxy.library.ohiou.edu/>

³⁶ Index, *Washington Post*, 1987 to 1989. See under “Ryan White,” Lexis Nexis® *Academic* database, accessed September 6, 2013, <http://www.lexisnexis.com.proxy.library.ohiou.edu/>

³⁷ Staff Reports, “Boy with AIDS Welcomed,” *Washington Post*, September 1, 1987.

questioned how the national newspapers could “portray Kokomo as such a haven for prejudice when Cicero was only thirty miles away.”³⁸ Contrary to the limited coverage of White by the *Times* and *Post*, *USA Today* significantly increased its coverage of him by featuring White in more than thirty articles.³⁹

During this period, White and his family developed a relationship with another national media source, *People* magazine. After not featuring him during 1985 or 1986, the magazine put White on the cover twice during these three years⁴⁰ and helped solidify his status as one of the prominent faces of the disease. Yamasaki recalled the first story they did on White for the August 3, 1987, cover:

We met Ryan, then 15, right after he moved in. He was 55 pounds or so, this tiny person whose growth had been stunted by the hemophilia and then by the AIDS. He was very, very shy and very suspicious of us. He had had many unpleasant dealings with the media. He felt like he had been at the center of a freak show. On the other hand, he felt that it was important for people to start learning what AIDS was really about—how you got it and how you didn’t. We were low key. I didn’t even take my cameras out for the first four hours. We weren’t going to do anything that made him uncomfortable. We ended up spending the whole day, and Ryan ended up being on *People*’s cover.⁴¹

This cover story, titled “Breaking America’s Heart,” chronicled twenty four hours in the “life” of the AIDS tragedy among many individuals inflicted with the disease.

White was chosen to grace the cover, and the images of a frail White lying in his bed and being taken care of by his mother were included in the piece. In the story, he is portrayed

³⁸ Scott Smith, “The Year the Media Came to Town,” *Kokomo Tribune*, September 25, 2006.

³⁹ Index, *USA Today*, 1987 to 1989. See under “Ryan White,” NewsBank®, accessed September 6, 2013, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.proxy.library.ohiou.edu>

⁴⁰ Index, *People*, 1987 to 1989. See under “Ryan White,” accessed September 6, 2013, <http://search.people.com/results.html?Ntt=%22Ryan+White%22&type=ch%3Anews%3B&searchSubmit=Search&Ntk=oldest>

⁴¹ Taro Yamasaki, “20 Years: AIDS & Photography,” *The Digital Journalist*, accessed March 8, 2008, http://digitaljournalist.org/issue0106/voices_yamasaki.htm

as weak and very ill, needing to warm his hands on the stove on a hot summer day. The article discussed in length his family's move to Cicero, and the harsh treatment he received from people in Kokomo:

His school kicked him out. Townspeople slashed the tires on the family car and pelted it with eggs; schoolmates taunted him; someone fired a bullet through his living-room window. . . . [O]n radio talk shows, he heard himself vilified as a "homo," "queer" and a "faggot." Once he was readmitted to school in Kokomo, his classmates "backed away from me and called me names," he remembers.⁴²

Yamasaki said the impact of the first story was significant:

A major magazine was addressing the topic of AIDS head on. The pictures showed really sick people. It was not reassuring. But it came across in an open, sympathetic, and honest way. The pictures said that people with AIDS were human beings. And one of the reasons I work for *People* magazine is because if there is any segment of the country that needs to know about these issues—Middle America, the audience that *People* hits. Anyone, gay or straight, rich or poor, of color or not, could look at those pictures, feel what Ryan was going through, and make that jump, that this could be my kid, my brother, my sister, my parent.⁴³

People's publisher at the time, Donald M. Elliman, Jr., said the piece drew the most favorable letter response to any article his magazine had ever run.⁴⁴ In the letters to the editor that followed in the August 24, 1987, issue, reader Lynne A. Kasey of Kokomo said she was "not aware of all the travesties committed against this innocent boy and his family," and thought that White "stood up to a town full of bigots and uncaring human beings."⁴⁵ Another reader, William G. Eaton of Westminster, Maryland, wrote that he "cannot understand the cruelty and heartlessness imposed upon the innocent youth Ryan

⁴² Jack Friedman and David Van Biema, "Breaking America's Heart," *People*, August 3, 1987, 61.

⁴³ Yamasaki, "20 Years: AIDS & Photography."

⁴⁴ Donald M. Elliman, Jr., "Publisher's Letter," *People*, December 28, 1987.

⁴⁵ "Mail," *People*, August 24, 1987.

White and his caring mother in Kokomo. . . . [C]an anyone come to the defense of Kokomo?” Interestingly, this prompted one of *People’s* editors to respond with a quote from Jeanne White that was not used in the story: “Kokomo is a good town. Most of our problems were caused by the same people over and over. It was just a few bad apples who wouldn’t leave us alone. I don’t hold the whole town responsible.”⁴⁶

The national newspapers analyzed in this study wrote about White in late August 1987, as he prepared for the new school year at his new high school, Hamilton Heights, in Arcadia, Indiana. Using wire services such as the AP, the *Times* and the *Post* both published news briefs in the back pages of their front sections. Both articles mentioned school officials discussing the transition for White to a new school as “smooth,” thanks to a heightened awareness about AIDS among the public.⁴⁷ This notion was further explored in a September 10, 1987, article in the *Times*. This article discussed the increasing prevalence of AIDS curriculums in school, and highlighted Hamilton Heights’ program as a catalyst in preparing students for White’s arrival; the school’s principal, Tony Cook, said that “The knowledge of the disease here is very high, so the majority are objective and open-minded.”⁴⁸

USA Today’s coverage of White in 1987 began with a story about Olympic diver Greg Louganis inviting White to watch him perform at the 1987 Pan American Games in Indianapolis. Louganis had befriended White and spoke highly of him in advance of White’s new school year: “I kidded him that he was getting more press than I was. He’s a

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Associated Press, “Indiana Teen-ager with AIDS Ready to Start School Today,” *New York Times*, August 31, 1987; Staff Reports, “Indiana Student Has Smooth Transition,” *Washington Post*, August 30, 1987.

⁴⁸ Associated Press, “Schools Bolster AIDS Curriculums,” *New York Times*, September 10, 1987.

good kid. He's getting ready to start school now and is scared. I told him I was scared when I started high school.”⁴⁹

Reporter John Norberg, who wrote for the *Lafayette (Indiana) Journal and Courier*, had his August 28, 1987, article on White's move to Cicero—and his acceptance at his new school—published on page 2A of *USA Today*. The article, titled “AIDS, School and Ryan White; People Friendlier in a New City,” mentioned how the lack of controversy surrounding White's new circumstances was a big improvement on his quality of life. The article also reflected on the White family's legal battle against Western School Corporation: “People there didn't want their children in class with an AIDS patient. It was a bitter dispute that ended up in court, newspaper headlines and national TV shows.”⁵⁰

The headline for this article was unique because, unlike the *Times* and *Post* at the time, White's full name was used instead of terms such as “Indiana Teen-ager,” or “Boy with AIDS.” The significance of this was not lost on *USA Today's* readers. After seeing a news brief on White on September 1, 1987, with the phrase “AIDS Boy” in the headline, reader George Painter of Columbus, Ohio, wrote this letter to the editor on September 23: “I would have assumed, with the large volume of news articles you print concerning AIDS, that you would show more compassion toward those about whom you write. Please, stop referring to Ryan White as the ‘AIDS boy.’”⁵¹

⁴⁹ Karen Allen, “Louganis on the Go,” *USA Today*, August 18, 1987.

⁵⁰ John Norberg, “AIDS, School and Ryan White; People Friendlier in a New City,” *USA Today*, August 28, 1987.

⁵¹ “Letterline,” *USA Today*.

White wasn't mentioned in the *Times* in 1988, except briefly in a front-page article about the U.S. confronting AIDS with a new sense of realism. The article mentioned that despite a "lack of leadership on AIDS by U.S. President Ronald Reagan," and a lack of a "well-thought-out national policy," individuals such as White were starting to be accepted by local communities who were educating themselves on the disease.⁵²

Like the *Times*, the *Post* also produced limited coverage of White in 1988. An October 2, 1988, story by Patricia Brennan focused on White's appearance on PBS' popular children's science show, *3-2-1 Contact*. Brennan wrote that "while avoiding conversation about intravenous drug use or sexual practices," the show did "help dispel misconceptions and fears and explain what AIDS is and how it acts on the body's immune system."⁵³

USA Today was the only one of the three national newspapers in this study to cover White as he testified in March 1988 before the U.S. presidential advisory commission on AIDS in Washington, D.C. The commission was studying ways to educate and protect the public from the disease. White was asked to testify about his struggle to attend school in Kokomo (another example of a story inaccurately placing Western Middle School in Kokomo, not Russiaville.) The article reported that both White and his "new friend," student council president Jill Stewart, explained how their school's "intensive education program made students more compassionate toward him." The article concluded that commissioners approved a \$2 billion package of recommendations

⁵² Bruce Lambert, "U.S. Confronting AIDS with Sense of Realism," *New York Times*, February 17, 1988.

⁵³ Patricia Brennan, "A Teen-Ager Explains AIDS," *Washington Post*, October 2, 1988.

to President Ronald Reagan for expanded health care, drug treatment programs, and research.⁵⁴

Two pieces published in *USA Today* later that year placed White's story within the context of AIDS and discrimination. The first, a June 24 editorial, asked President Reagan to drop his opposition to a federal law banning AIDS discrimination. It argued that while the "majority of victims are homosexual men and drug addicts, everyone is at risk" and that "had such a law been in effect, Ryan White, a teenage AIDS victim in Indiana, would not have had to suffer the trauma of being thrown out of school."⁵⁵ A July 11 article, titled, "Elton John Sings for AIDS Children," quoted actress and attendee Marlee Matlin, who said: "I'm here for the children. I care a great deal about them because they are the innocent victims."⁵⁶ Intention of the quote aside, it alluded to the controversial nature of how different victims of the disease were recognized by the public at this time.

People once again put White on the cover for its May 30, 1988, issue. This time, in a story titled "Amazing Grace," White was described as a much happier young boy since his family's move to Cicero, which was portrayed as a much more accepting community than Kokomo. The imagery in this story replaced photos of a bedridden White with a healthier looking boy playing pool, playing with his dog, and hugging his mom. Yamasaki said doing the second story was a completely different experience altogether:

⁵⁴ Cheryl Mattox Berry, "AIDS Victim Tells His Story; Compassion Conquers Ostracism," *USA Today*, March 4, 1988.

⁵⁵ Editorial, "The Debate: AIDS & Discrimination; Protect the Victims from Discrimination," *USA Today*, June 24, 1988.

⁵⁶ Jeanne Wright, "Elton John Sings for AIDS Children," *USA Today*, July 11, 1988.

After our second story, Ryan and his mom, who had been extremely reluctant the summer before, said that they felt happy with their decision to open up and be in *People*. It had made a tremendous difference in their lives because it helped others see them as they were, rather than as pariahs. We spent a lot of [time] with Ryan. We were getting to be friends, all of us.⁵⁷

This article detailed White's transformation as a compassionate AIDS advocate who defended all victims of the disease. In it, White traveled to Omaha, Nebraska, to talk about the disease with local residents and reporters. After being asked by a local minister about how his faith helped him with his disease, White responded: "I've learned that God doesn't punish people. I've learned that God doesn't dislike homosexuals, like a lot of Christians think. AIDS isn't their fault, just like it isn't my fault. God loves homosexuals as much as He loves everyone else." The article added the minister looked uncomfortable with the answer.⁵⁸ Throughout the article, White was consistently described as remarkable, courageous, graceful, wise, and brave, a boy with celebrity friends, but who just "wants to be treated like everyone else."⁵⁹ Reader response was also heavy for this story, including readers who praised Cicero for its compassion. However, another reader, from Kokomo, wrote to *People*, condemning the magazine for "its sensationalism and unprofessional conduct" in writing the article.⁶⁰

As with the local newspapers, the national newspapers also published articles on the January 1989 made-for-TV movie, *The Ryan White Story*. Instead of focusing on Kokomo's reaction to the film, as did the local press, the national press instead published

⁵⁷ Yamasaki, "20 Years: AIDS & Photography."

⁵⁸ Jack Friedman and Bill Shaw, "Amazing Grace," *People*, May 30, 1988, 88.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ "Mail," *People*, June 20, 1988.

reviews on the film and interviews with its star, Judith Light, a popular TV actress who portrayed Jeanne White in the film. In an interview with the *Post*, Light said she “marveled at Ryan’s spirit and defiance of the odds against AIDS victims.”⁶¹ The writer, Michael E. Hill, commented in the article that White’s survival had made him “a larger-than-life media figure, a teen-age evangelist of AIDS information, who has taken his message to schools, Congress and the talk-show circuit.”⁶² In an adjoining article, Brennan interviewed Jeanne White, who marveled at her son’s celebrity status: “I can’t believe it’s still going on. Four years in the media is a long time.”⁶³

When it came to White, the *Times* also focused on his TV movie in the context of how entertainment had portrayed the epidemic. The description mirrored what scholars had said about the media’s coverage of AIDS in its early years:

Once again prime-time television entertainment is approaching the subject of AIDS through the case of a hemophiliac youth infected through a transfusion of tainted blood. The vast majority of AIDS patients are homosexuals and drug addicts, but television apparently is not ready to explore these groups with any degree of compassion. Innocent youngsters trapped by circumstances beyond their control provide far easier dramatic hooks for uplift exercises. Still, these stories are indeed heartbreaking and do serve as vehicles for exposing public ignorance and prejudice about AIDS.⁶⁴

This theme continued in a March 19, 1989, *Times* article on AIDS and the arts. In it, author Michael Kimmelman wrote that, in regard to *The Ryan White Story*, “Rather than situating a black woman or a gay man or a drug addict as the key figure in a drama,

⁶¹ Michael E. Hill, “Judith Light: May She Never Say Never Again,” *Washington Post*, January 15, 1989.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Patricia Brennan, “Ryan White; In the Finest Sense, He’s a Survivor,” *Washington Post*, January 15, 1989.

⁶⁴ John J. O’Connor, “Review/Television; AIDS and Hemophilia,” *New York Times*, January 16, 1989.

network executives have tended to prefer white hemophiliac children, a relatively small group within the affected population.”⁶⁵ In other words, producers of television dramas had preferred to portray “innocent” AIDS victims during this time.

The reference to children as the “innocent victims” of AIDS continued in one story in *USA Today* around this time. In an April 10, 1989, article on the presentation of a plaque by Surgeon General C. Everett Koop to Sarasota, Florida, for its acceptance of the Ray family after their move from Arcadia, Florida, White was mentioned as having been in attendance. The article added that White was “thin, and the years of fighting the ravages of the disease have taken an obvious toll.”⁶⁶ Even though the presidential AIDS commission had found the previous year that most AIDS patients at the time were homosexual men or intravenous drug users,⁶⁷ two quotes from Koop in the article gave readers some possible insight into the government’s sentiments about AIDS victims.

Koop said in the article:

Many Americans, I’m sorry to say, prefer the easy path of confusion and fear rather than the more responsible path of truth and courage. As a result, many people with the AIDS virus suffer great cruelty at the hands of their fellow citizens. Many of those victims are children. Cruelty can never be excused in our society. But cruelty against children and other unwitting and innocent victims of the AIDS virus is especially inexcusable.⁶⁸

These references to White as an “innocent victim” of AIDS are examples of the media’s tendency early in the AIDS epidemic to occasionally frame AIDS patients into two different groups: “guilty victims,” such as homosexuals and intravenous drug users,

⁶⁵ Michael Kimmelman, “Bitter Harvest: AIDS and the Arts,” *New York Times*, March 19, 1989.

⁶⁶ Frances D. Williams, “Family Finds Life Free of Fear; Sons Have AIDS Virus,” *USA Today*, April 10, 1989.

⁶⁷ “The Debate: AIDS & Discrimination.”

⁶⁸ Williams, “Family Finds Life Free of Fear.”

and “innocent victims,” such as children and hemophiliacs. White helped the media frame the AIDS story by putting a human face on the epidemic, and he was a lead example of how reporters started framing AIDS stories by focusing on “innocent” children with AIDS.

Additional perspective of White and his role in the AIDS battle would be on display as coverage of his death occurred the following year.

1990: His Final Days

With his health beginning to fail and his eventual death putting an end to his tireless AIDS advocacy work, White’s appearance in the press in 1990 was mostly due to stories about his final days and hours, tributes to him in his death, and the congressional battle to fund the AIDS bill that bore his name. Of the national publications featured in this study, only *People* and *USA Today* heavily covered his final days. During 1990, the *Times* had only fifteen articles featuring White, and three of those articles barely mentioned White in the context of stories about former Indiana health commissioner Dr. Woodrow Myers, who had been recommended for New York City’s Commissioner of Health.⁶⁹ The *Post* had about the same amount of coverage with eleven articles,⁷⁰ while *USA Today* continued to increase its coverage of White

⁶⁹ Index, *New York Times*, 1990. See under “Ryan White,” Lexis Nexis® *Academic* database, accessed September 6, 2013, <http://www.lexisnexis.com.proxy.library.ohiou.edu/>

⁷⁰ Index, *Washington Post*, 1990. See under “Ryan White,” Lexis Nexis® *Academic* database, accessed September 6, 2013, <http://www.lexisnexis.com.proxy.library.ohiou.edu/>

with more than forty articles,⁷¹ including an editorial written by White's mother, Jeanne.

National media, as they had from the beginning of White's court battle, covered both his death and funeral and spoke of how he was courageous for bringing awareness to the disease. Given the greater amount of coverage it gave White in 1990, *USA Today* also led coverage of White's final days and death over the *Times* and *Post*. On April 2, it published an article claiming that White was fighting for his life. The flowery lead paragraph gave immense credit to White: "Plucky Ryan White – fighting for his life in an Indianapolis hospital – opened the school doors for other AIDS victims and proved the most innocent people can fall prey to this disease." The article also described him as "brave," "eloquent," and a "hero." It even quoted David Rosselot, the Kokomo lawyer who represented the local parents who filed suit to have White banned from school: "I have to look at AIDS in a different light today."⁷² While the *Times* ran no articles about White's worsening condition, the *Post* ran an April 3 news brief that said: "Ryan White, 18, a hemophiliac whose battle with AIDS brought him scorn in his hometown of Kokomo, Ind., but support from across the world, was hospitalized with internal bleeding in Indianapolis and is not expected to live, authorities said."⁷³ White died on Sunday, April 8, 1990, at Riley Hospital for Children in Indianapolis.

⁷¹ Index, *USA Today*, 1990. See under "Ryan White," NewsBank®, accessed September 6, 2013, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.proxy.library.ohiou.edu>

⁷² Judy Keen and Desda Moss, "Ryan White Fights for His Life," *USA Today*, April 2, 1990.

⁷³ Staff Reports, "Addenda," *Washington Post*, April 3, 1990.

The first time the name Ryan White appeared in the headline of the *Times* was an April 9 article on his death. The article said that White “put the face of a child on AIDS” and that he “helped pierce myths about AIDS, helping health experts and educators emphasize that it is not transmitted by casual contact, that it affects people from many walks of life.” Perhaps too late to change public opinion, the article concluded that Kokomo’s and Cicero’s reactions to White were often “cast in terms of good and bad,” but that it was “not quite that simple.”⁷⁴ The *Times* ran an AP story recapping White’s funeral three days later, which said that White “taught the nation a lesson in courage.”⁷⁵

USA Today led its wide coverage—three sections total—of White’s death with the following first paragraph: “The USA lost a beloved warrior against the stigma of AIDS when Ryan White died Sunday at 18.”⁷⁶ Its coverage also recalled White’s story and included quotes from those who knew White as well as past quotes from White himself.

The next day, it published a story that included a rare interview with White’s former stepfather, Steve Ford, who had been divorced from White’s mother for five years. Ford said he admired his former stepson’s ability to handle his poor health, his celebrity status, and his willingness to speak about AIDS: “He was always up to it, no

⁷⁴ Dirk Johnson, “Ryan White Dies of AIDS at 18; His Struggle Helped Pierce Myths,” *New York Times*, April 9, 1990, accessed August 18, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/04/09/obituaries/ryan-white-dies-of-aids-at-18-his-struggle-helped-pierce-myths.html?ref=dirkjohnson>

⁷⁵ Associated Press, “1,500 Attend Funeral of Courageous AIDS Fighter,” *New York Times*, April 12, 1990.

⁷⁶ Judy Keen, “Ryan: How You Live That Counts,” *USA Today*, April 9, 1990.

matter how bad he felt. He was a regular kid.”⁷⁷ The same day, it published an alarming story by reporter Sherry Jacobson on how AIDS discrimination in the U.S. was spreading despite White’s efforts. The article reiterated that a majority of U.S. AIDS cases had been homosexual or bisexual men and intravenous drug users.⁷⁸ Lawrence O. Gostin from the Harvard University School of Public Health spoke about White for this story:

In Ryan’s case, the country was able to come to understand that a young, white hemophiliac, a so-called innocent victim, shouldn’t be victimized because of his disease. But we’ve yet to come to terms with the fact that the poor, black, inner-city drug user is an innocent victim. . . . [T]he new focus of discrimination will be on Hispanic and black communities, which have huge burdens of AIDS cases. They are not articulate and well-organized like gays. And they are not innocent like young children. We will have, if anything, more discrimination in the future.⁷⁹

Soon after, in another article written by Jacobson titled, “AIDS Haunts Hemophiliacs,” the reporter claimed that 55 percent of hemophiliacs, as White was, were believed to have the virus. She also interviewed college professor Paul Haas, who was reported as having two sons with hemophilia. Haas said there was a reason why many hemophiliacs were shying away from being tested for the disease: “When someone has AIDS, the first reaction is that the person is gay. Our society does not like gayness, and I find that personally very offensive. But that’s society’s reaction.”⁸⁰

The *Post* dedicated almost one thousand words in its article on White’s death. In recapping White’s story over the past five years, the article interestingly recalled that

⁷⁷ Paula Jarrett, “Classmates Mourn Ryan White,” *USA Today*, April 10, 1990.

⁷⁸ Sherry Jacobson, “Despite Ryan White, AIDS Discrimination Spreads,” *USA Today*, April 10, 1990.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Sherry Jacobson, “AIDS Haunts Hemophiliacs,” *USA Today*, April 12, 1990.

White's school—in Russiaville—had barred him in 1985.⁸¹ This account contradicted the first article on White in the *Post*, which had a dateline of Kokomo. Two days later, the *Post* ran a controversial editorial on White written by former U.S. President Ronald Reagan. Titled, “We Owe It to Ryan,” the article asked readers not to mourn his death, but instead celebrate his “youthful innocence.” He recalled how “we wanted to hug [White] and make him better.”⁸² President Reagan added:

We owe it to Ryan to make sure that the fear and ignorance that chased him from his home and his school will be eliminated. We owe it to Ryan to open our hearts and our minds to those with AIDS. We owe it to Ryan to be compassionate, caring and tolerant toward those with AIDS, their families and friends. It's the disease that's frightening, not the people who have it.⁸³

Three days later, in a *Post* editorial, David Robinson responded to President Reagan:

As a gay man who has been fighting AIDS for three years . . . [I] found Ronald Reagan's tribute to Ryan White one of the most infuriating and embittering things I've read in a long time. . . . [R]eagan could have improved the survival chances of Ryan White and other people with AIDS by speaking out often and forcefully on AIDS. Instead it took him seven years to make a speech about AIDS. In that time, 50,000 Americans contracted the disease, and 30,000 died of it.⁸⁴

Even after White's death, the national media continued to misrepresent Kokomo. An article by Larry Tye, “White's Death Finally Hits Home,” was in the April 10, 1990, edition of the *Boston Globe*. Tye quoted Wiles, who said about Kokomo, “This is the heart of Middle America, a very conservative area, many of whose residents

⁸¹ Richard Pearson, “AIDS Patient Ryan White Dies; Indiana Youth's Plight Touched a Nation,” *Washington Post*, April 9, 1990.

⁸² Ronald Reagan, “We Owe It to Ryan,” *Washington Post*, April 11, 1990.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ David Robinson, “He Should Have Spoken Sooner,” *Washington Post*, April 14, 1990.

have moved out of Kokomo to escape crime and other problems that plague the blue-collar city of 50,000. That may have made them more vulnerable to scare campaigns about AIDS.”⁸⁵

Wiles recalled never meeting Tye nor giving such a statement, so he confronted the editors at the *Globe*, and it was discovered that the reporter admitted never coming to Kokomo.⁸⁶ Another issue with the same article was that it claimed Kokomo was the first place to ban a child with AIDS from going to school, which was untrue. A follow-up article in the *Globe* on May 21, 1990, “Placing an Unwarranted Stigma on the Community” corrected the inaccuracies from the April 10 article.⁸⁷ As Wiles later said, “That is wrong that the *Globe* story just perpetuated inaccuracies that Kokomo in some way barred White from school. Nothing could be farther from the truth.”⁸⁸

People’s coverage of White’s final days stands out from all of articles from that year that were analyzed in this study. As mentioned earlier, Shaw and Yamasaki from *People* were the only journalists allowed in White’s hospital room at Riley Hospital during his final days.⁸⁹ Yamasaki recalled the event:

His health, by 1990, was getting progressively worse. And I got a call from Jeanne. “Ryan’s dying. You and Bill are the only journalists who are going to be in the intensive care unit with us. Please come as soon as possible.” We rushed to Indiana. There must have been 75 journalists downstairs in one of the waiting rooms. Ryan was a huge story by then. Ryan was in a coma when I got there. He never regained consciousness. Jeanne said, ‘Please don’t photograph Ryan’s

⁸⁵ Larry Tye, “White’s Death Finally Hits Home,” *Boston Globe*, April 10, 1990.

⁸⁶ Wiles telephone interview.

⁸⁷ Robert L. Kierstead, “Placing an Unwarranted Stigma on a Community,” *Boston Globe*, May 21, 1990.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ White-Ginder telephone interview, March 5, 2008.

face, I don't want to remember him like this.' He was very swollen. And that's why the photograph you see of Jeanne and Elton John, at Ryan's bedside, does not include Ryan from the neck up.

That entire week was pretty remarkable for me. I wasn't just a photographer, but a friend caught up in a story. When Ryan died, everybody went into his room and held hands around the bed. I was in there with a camera. And Jeanne said, "Taro, you can take the picture or you can join us." And I put my camera down and I joined the circle. I knew that was an important picture. I knew that it was a moment I should "get." But I also knew that the reason I was in there in the first place was that they were not thinking about me as a photographer and I was not relating to them as a photographer. I knew I was going to wish I had taken that picture on some level but I just felt like I had to join that circle.⁹⁰

The photo was part of *People's* April 23, 1990, cover story on White's death.

The article, "Candle in the Wind," was described as "the moving, untold story of the final hours of Ryan White, the boy whose battle with AIDS touched America's heart."⁹¹

Shaw wrote that family friend and musician Elton John had rushed to Riley Hospital to be there despite his record company's demands for him to be in Los Angeles to promote his new record. The article also captured the emotional final moments of White's life:

"Just let go, Ryan," Jeanne White says quietly. "It's time, sweetheart. It's time to go." His blood pressure drops further. "Goodbye, buddy, goodbye, my pumpkin," says Jeanne as she strokes her son's hand. Her tears are gone for now. Only a calm soothing voice. "I want to kiss you goodbye one more time," she murmurs, leaning across the bed, stroking his forehead and gently kissing his cheek. The green dial on the heart monitor clicks off. Ryan's chest is still. A nurse attempts to restart the monitor. It flashes bright red. No heartbeat. No blood pressure. A doctor leans over with a stethoscope and nods. Ryan White is dead at 7:11 A.M. on Palm Sunday.⁹²

⁹⁰ Yamasaki, "20 Years: AIDS & Photography."

⁹¹ Bill Shaw, "Candle in the Wind," *People*, April 23, 1990.

⁹² Ibid.

As had his previous *People* articles, White's story greatly affected readers. Managing editor Landon Y. Jones, Jr., said that the April 23 story drew more than 1,000 letters. He also said White was perhaps, "the best-known face of AIDS."⁹³

Throughout the rest of 1990, the newspapers analyzed in this study mostly reported on White in terms of the decision for the U.S. Congress to fund what would eventually become the Ryan White CARE Act. In a May 20, 1990, *Times* article, "How the Politics Shifted on AIDS Funds," Representative John Lewis (D-Ga.) said that AIDS had an effect on several communities: "There is no way we can go around anymore saying this is an issue just affecting the gay community. In recent days, the life and death of Ryan White brought it home to many, many people." Reporter Susan Rasky wrote that "lawmakers mentioned [White] as a politically safe symbol of the disease's devastation, a symbol that compelled changing the terms of the debate on providing funds to deal with AIDS."⁹⁴ White's final appearance in the *Times* in 1990 was an October 25 story and was in regards to appropriations for the Ryan White CARE bill.⁹⁵

The *Post* only mentioned White throughout the rest of 1990 in the context of the Ryan White CARE bill. In a May 16, 1990, article, Helen Dewar reported that Senator Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) criticized the naming of the bill in memory of White: "The tragedy of Ryan White is being exploited to promote a political agenda of the homosexual community." To which fellow conservative, Senator Orrin Hatch (R-Utah)

⁹³ Landon Y. Jones, Jr., "Editor's Letter," *People*, December 31, 1990.

⁹⁴ Susan Rasky, "How the Politics Shifted on AIDS Funds," *New York Times*, May 20, 1990.

⁹⁵ John Tierney, "At Conference on AIDS, the Talk is of Lobbying," *New York Times*, October 25, 1990.

responded: “We don’t spurn the accident victim who didn’t wear a seat belt. We don’t reject the cancer patient who didn’t quit smoking. We try to love them and care for them and comfort them.”⁹⁶

Like the *Times* and *Post*, *USA Today* also reported on the debate over the Ryan White CARE bill. However, it also allowed Jeanne White to write an editorial in response to a cut in appropriations to the original \$880 million set aside in its funds:

Ryan never once blamed anybody for his disease . . . the only thing that ever really angered him was the hate-mongering and discrimination. If my son leaves anything behind, it is a message that the blaming part of AIDS must forever be replaced by concern and compassion for people who are ill. The Ryan White AIDS Care Bill is just the memorial that my boy would have picked for himself.⁹⁷

The final tribute to White in *USA Today* was in its “Passages” section for 1990:

Ryan White, 18, Indiana teen who became national symbol of difficulties faced by children with AIDS. He was banned from classes and shunned by schoolmates in Kokomo, Ind., after contracting AIDS from a blood transfusion in treatment for hemophilia. Admirers included Barbara Bush and Michael Jackson. AIDS complications, April 8, Indianapolis.⁹⁸

This next chapter primarily summarizes the findings from the previous chapters and explains this information in terms of how local and national print media covered White’s story from 1985 to 1990, how White’s story impacted the way AIDS was covered in the local and national print media, and what journalistic themes can be concluded from the media’s coverage. Finally, as with any research project, limitations to the study are addressed.

⁹⁶ Helen Dewar, “\$1.2 Billion AIDS Bill Nearing Senate Approval; Metropolitan Areas, States Would Split Funds,” *Washington Post*, May 16, 1990.

⁹⁷ Jeanne White, “Editorial,” *USA Today*, September 18, 1990.

⁹⁸ “Passages 1990,” *USA Today*, December 27, 1990.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Before the United States became familiar with Ryan White's story, acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) was largely misunderstood. In some instances, AIDS was simply treated as the punch line to a tasteless joke. For example, legendary comedian Bob Hope, who many considered a national treasure due to his performances for U.S. troops through the United Services Organization, quipped the following during the rededication ceremony of the Statue of Liberty in 1986: "I just heard the Statue of Liberty has AIDS. Nobody knows if she got it from the mouth of the Hudson or the Staten Island 'Fairy.'"¹

Not only was the disease misunderstood early on, it also caused a ripple of fear among the public. Though researchers claim the media were slow to cover the epidemic, journalists still played a major role in disseminating information about the disease to the public.² Public survey results suggest the U.S. population, in general, became aware of the disease by the mid-1980s. At the same time, many individuals continued to be confused about certain aspects of the disease,³ such as its transmission between individuals.

In both the local and national articles featuring White that were analyzed in this study, his story generally began with his family's legal battle against his local school

¹ David Jefferson and Ramin Setoodeh, "How AIDS Changed America," *Newsweek*, May 15, 2006, 36-41.

² Mollyann Brodie, Elizabeth Hamel, Lee Ann Brady, Jennifer Kates, and Drew E. Altman, "AIDS at 21: Media Coverage of the AIDS Epidemic: 1981-2002," *Columbia Journalism Review* 42 (2004): S1-S8.

³ Everett M. Rogers, James W. Dearing, and Soonbum Chang, "AIDS in the 1980s: The Agenda-Setting Process for a Public Issue," *Journalism Monographs* 126 (April 1991): 7-8; Alonzo Plough and Sheldon Krinsky, "The Emergence of Risk Communication Studies: Social and Political Context," *Science, Technology, and Human Values* 12, nos. 3-4 (1987): 4-10.

system for the right to attend school despite his illness. The coverage of this controversial story brought increased public interest and helped spur a better understanding of the means of AIDS transmission between individuals. This understanding was that the disease was spread by sexual contact, contaminated needles, and blood transfusions, with no evidence at the time it was spread by casual contact.⁴ As a result, the topic of AIDS transmission was increasingly covered by the media. This study also found that White helped change the false perception shared by many people that AIDS was just a “gay disease.” The articles analyzed within found White was consistently referred to as a “hemophiliac,” who was “diagnosed with AIDS as a result of a tainted blood transfusion.” His impact may not be in the total number of articles written about him,⁵ although Everett Rogers, et.al, found that the average number of news stories about AIDS among major media outlets increased more than 900 percent over the forty months after the first story on White appeared in the national media.⁶ Rather, White’s impact is demonstrated by the evolution of how AIDS was framed in the media while journalists covered his story.

During the five years he was covered by the media, White gained local, national, and international notoriety as a young boy who made the most of his tragically short life by fighting AIDS with a passion to inform others about the epidemic. His recommendation for the compassionate and dignified treatment of all people with AIDS created greater (and much-needed) context of the disease for the general public.

⁴ Associated Press, “Boy With AIDS to Get Schooling by Telephone,” *New York Times*, August 24, 1985.

⁵ Brodie, et.al, “AIDS at 21: Media Coverage of the AIDS Epidemic: 1981-2002,” S2.

⁶ Rogers, Dearing, and Chang, “AIDS in the 1980s,” 13.

This study pieced together, through use of academic research, textual analysis of articles on White, interviews, and first-hand accounts, how local and national journalists covered White's story. In turn, both professionals and academicians in journalism and mass communications will have a better understanding of how the media has covered AIDS in its early years and the impact of White's story in this coverage.

In 1985, a few months before White's story broke in the national press, actor Rock Hudson, who was gay, became the first celebrity to announce he had AIDS.⁷ Although White was not the first person with AIDS to gain fame because of the disease, the media portrayed him as a tragic figure and victim. He raised public awareness and knowledge about AIDS and helped finally put a human face on the epidemic.

Rogers, et.al, found that it was White's story, more so than that of Hudson, which propelled AIDS up the news agenda. This was likely the result of the nature of Hudson's infection and secrecy surrounding his illness. Regardless, White helped break the "gay stigma" of the disease by making people around the world realize that AIDS could be contracted by anyone, and the media found it more "palatable" to cover a courageous young boy in his fight against AIDS.⁸

White was originally a central Indiana story. Through the articles analyzed in this study, local publications such as the *Kokomo Tribune*, *Indianapolis Star*, *Indianapolis News*, and *Indianapolis Monthly*, because of their proximity to the story, provided a more in-depth and accurate portrayal of White. For example, the *Tribune* wrote more articles

⁷ Carol Elrod, "Now a Household Word, AIDS is Invading 'Straight' World," *Indianapolis Star*, August 4, 1985.

⁸ Leavitt, David. "The Way I Live Now," *New York Times*, July 9, 1989, accessed October 10, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/07/09/magazine/the-way-i-live-now.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>

about White over these five years than the four national publications analyzed for this study—combined. White’s story also allowed local journalists to regularly cover the AIDS issue. John Wiles, who covered White as managing editor of the *Tribune*, said that White’s story was more than just another news story: “Before Ryan, there was very little information about AIDS [in the local media]. No one knew how you could catch it. But through our research, we tried to educate the public about it as much as possible.”⁹

The scope of the local print media’s coverage of White changed dramatically with the events that developed in his life. In the first two years of White’s public life, the majority of the coverage focused on his family’s legal battle to attend school and the uncertainty of AIDS as a communicable disease. Eventually, the focus of the articles shifted toward more of the new life and comfort White found when he and his family moved to Cicero and his advocacy for AIDS awareness.

The *Tribune* began as the most involved newspaper in White’s story, yet due to objectivity issues and the Whites’ move to a different city, began to limit its coverage of him in his final years. The opposite occurred with the *Star* and the *News*, both of which increased their coverage of White in his final year, especially with the extensive coverage of his death and funeral.

Unlike the local press, the national media had covered AIDS in the U.S. from the beginning of the epidemic. This gave the readers of publications such as the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *USA Today*, and *People* a greater understanding of the disease before White. Therefore, these national publications did not focus heavily on medical

⁹ John Wiles, telephone interview by Andrew J. Heger, March 6, 2008. Wiles was the managing editor of the *Kokomo Tribune*, which is the top editorial position at that paper, for more than thirty years. He is the director of downtown activities for the Kokomo Downtown Association.

information about AIDS within the context of their stories featuring White, beyond the idea of how AIDS was transmitted as local concern grew toward White exposing his classmates to the disease.

Throughout the history of AIDS, media coverage of the disease has generally reflected key events,¹⁰ which aligns with the theory that says media coverage of trends is event-driven.¹¹ This theory states that after each major event occurs, the amount of coverage declines until another event refreshes media interest and adds different angles to the story. Unlike the local press, the national press was not covering White daily. Instead, this study found the national newspapers, especially the *Times* and *Post*, tended to only cover White when it came to final decisions about his legal case and the local community's immediate reaction, events he attended as an advocate for AIDS awareness, and the announcement of his death and funeral.

Like the local press, White's story began in the national print media once he was banned from Western Middle School in Russiaville, Indiana. Unlike the local publications in this study, the *Times*, *Post*, and *USA Today* had started out mostly publishing short wire stories about White's situation. They only began assigning features on White to staff reporters when it came to stories on Kokomo's reaction to White's case. On the other hand, local publications attempted to keep its readers regularly attuned to the legal aspect of White's story. Over the five years White was in the public eye, this study found that he was not covered regularly by a national reporter in any of the national

¹⁰ Brodie, et.al, "AIDS at 21: Media Coverage of the AIDS Epidemic: 1981-2002," S2.

¹¹ Paula A. Treichler, *How to Have Theory in an Epidemic: Cultural Chronicles of AIDS* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press Books, 1999): 77.

publications featured in this study. Local journalists, such as Mark Nichols of the *Star*, stated that the local media had concerns about the arrival of the national media at first, who were coming in and out of the area to get their “five-second sound bites.”¹² In most of the national articles reviewed in this study, White’s name wasn’t even mentioned in the headline; usually, he was referred to as “Boy with AIDS,” or, to the scorn of some readers, the “AIDS Boy.”¹³

In looking at the literature review, articles, and first-hand accounts from this study, some other mass communication theories are worth discussing within both the local and national coverage of White: for example, the model that journalists are objective in their reporting or should at least strive to be. Some of the publications in this study pushed the limits of this model. For example, *People* publisher Donald M. Elliman, Jr., said in his December 28, 1987, letter to readers that “*People* always believed that making connections is important to journalism and to human beings – not only the pure, intellectual connections that unlock truths, but also the kind that take place when we throw open windows on other lives, the better to know who we are.”¹⁴ One of the magazine’s photojournalists, Taro Yamasaki, became one of White’s favorite media people, and he and reporter Bill Shaw did three stories on White for *People* magazine. White’s mother, Jeanne, said their coverage was “wonderful,” which is why they were the only journalists she allowed into her son’s hospital room during

¹² Mark Nichols, telephone interview by Andrew J. Heger, March 4, 2008. Nichols is still employed by the *Indianapolis Star* as its Computer-Assisted Reporting Coordinator.

¹³ “Letterline,” *USA Today*, September 23, 1987.

¹⁴ Donald M. Elliman, Jr., “Publisher’s Letter,” *People*, December 28, 1987.

his final hours.¹⁵ According to Yamasaki, he became friends with White and his family as he covered them more for the magazine. Even in covering White's final hours, Yamasaki said that "they were not thinking about me as a photographer and I was not relating to them as a photographer."¹⁶ In this example, it appears that *People*, like many magazines, did not strive for objectivity in its reporting on White, but rather, a human interest story that could touch the hearts of its target audience, which was middle America, according to Yamasaki.¹⁷ It could be argued that as a magazine, *People* merely did what most magazines do, which is to have an attitude toward the subject. This is something that sets magazine feature writing apart from its news media counterpart. This notion, along with its acceptance of the White family as more than news subjects, allowed *People* to have the most in-depth coverage of all of the national media analyzed in this study. Although this method was successful in drawing readers to White's story, it should be noted that this same approach may have resulted in biased coverage of medical patients like White. During the infancy of the AIDS epidemic, when reliable information about the disease was crucial, this type of reporting may have helped strike an emotional chord with the public while at the same time compromising the media's ability to focus on the dissemination of necessary facts about the disease.

Issues of objectivity in covering the Whites also came up at the *Tribune*. Wiles was forced to pull reporter Christopher MacNeil from covering the Whites when he was caught on camera—twice—hugging both White and his mother. These actions by

¹⁵ Jeanne White-Ginder, telephone interview by Andrew J. Heger, March 5, 2008. Jeanne is Ryan White's mother.

¹⁶ Taro Yamasaki, "20 Years: AIDS & Photography," *The Digital Journalist*, accessed March 8, 2008, http://digitaljournalist.org/issue0106/voices_yamasaki.htm

¹⁷ Ibid.

MacNeil received complaints from *Tribune* readers, and Wiles believed MacNeil lost credibility as a journalist. At the time, MacNeil had covered the White family for more than a year and had grown very close to them. In a 1986 *Indianapolis Monthly* article, MacNeil said White had started to call him “Dad.” Wiles said it was a tough decision to remove MacNeil from this assignment since he had been on the story from the beginning. The *Tribune* never had another reporter specifically assigned to cover White.

Even though White was seen as a sympathetic figure to those closest to him, including journalists like MacNeil and Yamasaki, it could be concluded that the hug between the Whites and MacNeil caused *Tribune* management and readers, especially in a town already sensitized by White’s story, to lose trust and confidence in MacNeil’s reporting. Unlike magazines, which have target audiences and specific business interests, newspapers are considered by the public to be more objective in their reporting. In stories that require interpretive judgment in the face of uncertainty and scientific disagreement,¹⁸ like AIDS and the legal battles involving children with the disease, it is very important journalists strive to get opposing viewpoints; however, studies have shown that, not surprisingly, advocates of an issue try to influence style and content of the media’s portrayal of their issues.¹⁹ It seems most readers of newspapers understand this, and in the end, the hard work MacNeil put into informing the public about White and the AIDS epidemic evolved into a distrust of his reporting among the very same people.

¹⁸ Dorothy Nelkin, “AIDS and the News Media,” *The Milbank Quarterly* 69, no. 2 (1991): 294.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 296.

Another theory worth discussing in this study is the issue of framing. The idea of framing a news story comes from the late sociologist Erving Goffman, who observed that communication media are like a window to the world. This theory pertains to journalists, since each come from their own unique frame of reference. In the infancy of the AIDS epidemic, framing this issue as an important social problem in the U.S. was difficult. Initially, when AIDS was considered a “gay stigma,” there was a growing intolerance of the homosexuals it plagued.²⁰

Further distorting the AIDS issue around this time was the media’s tendency to occasionally frame AIDS patients into two different groups: “guilty victims,” such as homosexuals and intravenous drug users, whose actions were perceived as controllable;²¹ and “innocent victims” such as White, who as a child and a hemophiliac,²² contracted the disease through actions that were considered beyond his control. Even though he used the media to promote his advocacy toward AIDS awareness, which was noble, he also inadvertently helped perpetuate this idea of “innocent” versus “guilty” AIDS victims because of who he was—a young child who “just wanted to be a normal kid,” a phrase often quoted from White and his mother in several of the articles studied within this paper.

²⁰ Kaiser Health News’ Daily Report, “The Kaiser Daily HIV/AIDS Report Examines Early Media Reporting on AIDS, 20 Years Later,” accessed August 18, 2013, <http://www.kaiserhealthnews.org/Daily-Reports/2001/June/04/dr00004944>

²¹ Gregory M. Herek and John P. Capitanio, “AIDS Stigma and Sexual Prejudice,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 42, no. 7 (1999): 1134.

²² E. Glenn Schellenberg, Janet M. Keil, and Sandra L. Bem, “Innocent Victims of AIDS: Identifying the Subtext,” *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 25 (1995): 1790-1800.

Although White defended all victims of the disease, this message got lost in the back pages of stories about him.²³ Reporters decided to give more attention to White's personal struggles as a young boy who was considered a pariah in his own community.²⁴ The media continuously capitalized on references to "innocent victims" of AIDS in the media, which implies that other people with AIDS are considered "blameworthy."²⁵ This study found this caused concern among some media commentators, such as David Leavitt, who felt the media's portrayal of "innocent victims" like White helped accentuate our society's prejudices against gay men and drug users. Leavitt believed that the public perception of these marginalized groups, in the context of the AIDS issue, was that they were the ones who had originally tainted the blood and were therefore seen as responsible for the plight of children with the disease.²⁶

Lawrence O. Gostin from the Harvard University School of Public Health also spoke of his concerns about this issue: "In Ryan's case, the country was able to come to understand that a young, white hemophiliac, a so-called innocent victim, shouldn't be victimized because of his disease. But we've yet to come to terms with the fact that the poor, black, inner-city drug user is an innocent victim."²⁷

In the articles analyzed for this study, there were several instances in stories where it was implied that White was an "innocent" victim. This was not a description

²³ Jack Friedman and Bill Shaw, "Amazing Grace," *People*, May 30, 1988.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Schellenberg, Keil, and Bem, "Innocent Victims of AIDS," 1790-1800.

²⁶ Leavitt, "The Way I Live Now."

²⁷ Sherry Jacobson, "Despite Ryan White, AIDS Discrimination Spreads," *USA Today*, April 10, 1990.

bestowed upon the marginalized groups afflicted by this disease. For example, these articles included the following descriptions of White: “fine and loving and gentle person;”²⁸ “this could be my kid, my brother, my sister, my parent;”²⁹ and “youthful innocence.”³⁰

Two *USA Today* stories about White spoke more overtly in terms of mentioning White as an “innocent victim.” In one, then-Surgeon General C. Everett Koop was quoted in his speech on children with AIDS, including White, who was in the audience: “Cruelty can never be excused in our society. But cruelty against children and other unwitting and innocent victims of the AIDS virus is especially inexcusable.”³¹ In another story, published days before White died, it said: “Ryan White . . . proved the most innocent people can fall prey to this disease.”³²

This study also found that many national articles framed the city of Kokomo as a community of prejudice and ignorance in its treatment of White. Ironically, the first article ever written about White in the press, in the *Tribune*, painted a different story of the city. The story included information about a foundation set up by Jeanne White’s

²⁸ Dirk Johnson, “Ryan White Dies of AIDS at 18; His Struggle Helped Pierce Myths,” *New York Times*, April 9, 1990, accessed August 18, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/04/09/obituaries/ryan-white-dies-of-aids-at-18-his-struggle-helped-pierce-myths.html?ref=dirkjohnson>

²⁹ Yamasaki, “20 Years: AIDS & Photography.”

³⁰ Ronald Reagan, “We Owe It to Ryan,” *Washington Post*, April 11, 1990.

³¹ Frances D. Williams, “Family Finds Life Free of Fear; Sons Have AIDS Virus,” *USA Today*, April 10, 1989.

³² Judy Keen and Desda Moss, “Ryan White Fights for His Life,” *USA Today*, April 2, 1990.

coworkers at Delco Electronics Division in Kokomo for people to donate money in order to help the White family cover the costs of his treatment.³³

But this changed when the White family became embroiled in its legal battle. Although White was not the only AIDS victim to return to school, his case was unusual because he and his mother made a public issue of it. In similar cases in other school districts, the names of the pupils had not been disclosed.³⁴ James Kinsella mentioned that White was not the first child with AIDS to be shut out of school, but his protest was the first to be heard in court and the first to gain a national spotlight.³⁵ Perhaps had White's legal battle not put them in the local and national spotlight, Kokomo would not have been singled out in the national press. It can be concluded that, as White helped bring a face to the epidemic, Kokomo made a great foil for his story.

There were other inconsistencies and errors about Kokomo within some of the national stories in this study. For example, several articles failed to mention that Western Schools were in Russiaville; most datelines from the stories on White's legal battle to attend school were from Kokomo. One reporter claimed that because White was a *Tribune* paperboy, many people canceled their subscriptions to this newspaper,³⁶ while another misrepresented Wiles' sentiments about Kokomo. Wiles refuted both of these

³³ Steve Marchand, "Local Youth Faces AIDS," *Kokomo Tribune*, March 3, 1985.

³⁴ James Barron, "AIDS Sufferer's Return to Class is Cut Short," *New York Times*, February 22, 1986.

³⁵ James Kinsella, *Covering the Plague: AIDS and the American Media* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989): 187.

³⁶ Michael Specter, "AIDS Victim's Right to Attend Public School Tested in Corn Belt," *Washington Post*, September 3, 1985.

claims,³⁷ and added: “I feel that the national media didn’t want the facts to get in the way of a good story.”³⁸ Like Kokomo itself, some local opponents of White, such as Mitzi Johnson, were characterized much more harshly in the national press than in local articles.

In journalism, the news agenda is defined by a list of events or issues that are viewed at one point in time ranked in the hierarchy of importance. The agenda-setting theory refers to the ability of the media to influence what the public thinks is important. Wiles said the media circus didn’t start until White and his family went public with their decision to file a lawsuit against Western Schools Corporation.³⁹ White also was an example of how a celebrity, through disclosure of his personal life experiences, can influence the agenda-setting process.⁴⁰ When determining the news agenda, risk events (such as White’s story) are considered the most newsworthy when they involve human interest or personal dramas.⁴¹ However, newsworthiness, often typified by novelty or sensationalism, does not lend itself to contextualized reporting on a topic, particularly when the topic is a disease as complex and persistent as AIDS.⁴²

In comparing how White and his local community, in both the context of his battle against the disease and in his resulting celebrity, were covered by the local and

³⁷ Wiles telephone interview.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Arvind Singhal and Everett M. Rogers, *Combating AIDS: Communication Strategies in Action* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2003): 91.

⁴¹ Nelkin, “AIDS and the News Media,” 295.

⁴² Pamela J. Shoemaker with Elizabeth Kay Mayfield, “Building a Theory of News Content: A Synthesis of Current Approaches,” *Journalism Monographs* 103 (June 1987).

national press, this study discovered what this said about each publication's news value. Based on the local and national articles analyzed, established news sources such as the *Star*, *News*, *Times*, and *Post* were more consistent in their coverage of White through more of a hard news, event-driven approach to the story. The *Tribune* did an admirable job of owning the White story early and acting as an important source of information about the AIDS disease to an uninformed community. The *Tribune* thought part of the newspaper's role was that of educator. Its editors and reporters reasoned that if people were presented with enough clearly explained facts, they would reach a well-informed, intelligent decision. This example, much like the *Harrisburg Patriot-News* with the recent Penn State University scandal involving sexual abuse by a member of the football coaching staff, are testaments to the importance of local journalism based on proximity and the ability to provide a broader perspective to controversial local stories. Unfortunately, the *Tribune* lost objectivity and, eventually, control of the White story.

Not all newspapers adhered to the hard news aspect of White's story. Although it started that way, *USA Today* evolved from event-driven stories to occasional features and shorter, easy-to-read stories on White's advocacy work and the portrayal of his acceptance in Cicero. This resulted in more coverage of White from a national level through this newspaper. The magazines featured in this study, the *Indianapolis Monthly* and *People*, also provided occasional features on White that touched on the most heartbreaking elements of the story rather than factual information surrounding the main events in White's public life.

Studies have shown that U.S. media coverage of AIDS has influenced public knowledge of, opinion about, and behavioral response toward the disease, as well as

public policy regarding research, funding, and education.⁴³ However, Horst Stipp and Dennis Kerr found that anti-gay attitudes constrained the ability of the media to effectively communicate information about risk factors and how the disease was transmitted, and researchers needed to explore the possibility that anti-gay attitudes stood between media information and public knowledge and public opinion. White might not have changed anti-gay attitudes, but this research found he opened a dialogue about the transmission of the disease, and made people aware that the disease was more widespread than previously believed,⁴⁴ even for those not directly afflicted with AIDS.

In its article on White's death, the *Times* said that he "helped pierce myths about AIDS, helping health experts and educators emphasize that it is not transmitted by casual contact, that it affects people from many walks of life." Perhaps too late to change public opinion, the article also concluded that Kokomo's and Cicero's reactions to White were often "cast in terms of good and bad," but that it was "not quite that simple."⁴⁵ White's story, too, was not that simple, but he made his mark within the overall history of the AIDS story. Simply put, as White's mother, Jeanne, said about Ryan: "He put a face to the epidemic, so people could care about people with AIDS."⁴⁶

As with any study, there are limitations to this research. For example, the study was unable to secure interviews and/or first-hand accounts from national newspaper and local magazine reporters of those publications studied in the research. In addition, *USA*

⁴³ Robin C. Stevens and Shawnika J. Hull, "The Colour of AIDS: An Analysis of Newspaper Coverage of HIV/AIDS in the United States from 1992–2007," *Critical Arts* 27, no. 3 (2013): 353.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 354.

⁴⁵ Johnson, "Ryan White Dies of AIDS at 18."

⁴⁶ Jefferson and Setoodeh, "How AIDS Changed America," 36-41.

Today articles were retrieved in a manner inconsistent with other national newspapers in the study. Also, it might have been beneficial to study a publication that was located in the western region of the country, like the *San Francisco Chronicle*, which covered AIDS as a regular beat in the 1980s.

One of the strengths of this study was the inclusion of first-hand accounts of those local journalists who covered White. Some of the national reporters who covered White for the publications included in this study did not respond to multiple email requests for interviews. This would have undoubtedly strengthened the overall research presented in this thesis. Also, more analysis of articles on AIDS not featuring White during these five years could have made for a stronger analysis of White's story within the context of the overall coverage of AIDS within this time period.

Overall, this study adds to the current literature about media coverage of health epidemics, especially AIDS. Through the example of Ryan White's story, it not only provides considerations for other journalists on how future diseases with social stigmas should be covered, but it also points to the differences and strengths of different forms of media, specifically newspapers and magazines. This study also provides a thorough analysis of the effective role community journalism can play in covering a major story. Finally, this thesis presents an area of future study in that it raises interesting research questions about journalism ethics and the fine line between reporting and becoming part of the story.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Addenda. *Washington Post*, April 12, 1986.
- AIDS.gov. "How Do You Get HIV or AIDS?" Accessed August 8, 2013.
<http://www.aids.gov/hiv-aids-basics/hiv-aids-101/how-you-get-hiv-aids/>
- AIDS.gov. "Opportunistic Infections and Their Relationship to HIV/AIDS."
Accessed October 10, 2013.
<http://www.aids.gov/hiv-aids-basics/staying-healthy-with-hiv-aids/potential-related-health-problems/opportunistic-infections/>
- AIDS.gov. "U.S. Statistics." Accessed October 6, 2013.
<http://www.aids.gov/hiv-aids-basics/hiv-aids-101/statistics/>
- AIDS.gov. "What is a CD4 Cell or T-Cell?" Accessed October 10, 2013.
<http://www.aids.gov/hiv-aids-basics/just-diagnosed-with-hiv-aids/understand-your-test-results/cd4-count/>
- Allen, Karen. "Louganis on the Go." *USA Today*, August 18, 1987.
- Alley Swain, Kristen. "Approaching the Quarter-Century Mark: AIDS Coverage and Research Decline as Infection Spreads." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 22, no. 3 (August 2005): 258-62.
- Altman, Lawrence K. "Rare Cancer Seen in 41 Homosexuals." *New York Times*, July 3, 1981. Accessed August 18, 2013.
<http://www.nytimes.com/1981/07/03/us/rare-cancer-seen-in-41-homosexuals.html>
- Angell, Marcia. "A Dual Approach to the AIDS Epidemic," *New England Journal of Medicine* 324 (1991): 1498-1500.
- Associated Press. "1,500 Attend Funeral of Courageous AIDS Fighter." *New York Times*, April 12, 1990.
- Associated Press. "AIDS Victim Kept from School in Indiana." *New York Times*, August 1, 1985.
- Associated Press. "Boy With AIDS to Get Schooling by Telephone." *New York Times*, August 24, 1985.
- Associated Press. "Indiana Teen-ager with AIDS Ready to Start School Today." *New York Times*, August 31, 1987.
- Associated Press. "Kokomo Wants to Better Image with AIDS Research Fund Drive." *Indianapolis Star*, March 17, 1986.
- Associated Press. "'Ryan White Story' to Appear on TV." *Kokomo Tribune*, December 19, 1988.

- Associated Press. "Schools Bolster AIDS Curriculum." *New York Times*, September 10, 1987.
- Bacon, Kay. "Worried Parents Attend Meeting." *Kokomo Tribune*, August 13, 1985.
- Barron, James. "AIDS Sufferer's Return to Class is Cut Short." *New York Times*, February 22, 1986.
- Bell, Steve. "Look Back in Anger." *Indianapolis Monthly*, July 1, 1986.
- Beyette, Beverly. "Ryan's Hope – Legacy: Through his extraordinary courage, an ordinary young boy inspired thousands of AIDS sufferers and taught a nation some lessons in compassion." *Los Angeles Times*, April 10, 1990.
- Brennan, Patricia. "A Teen-Ager Explains AIDS." *Washington Post*, October 2, 1988.
- Brennan, Patricia. "Ryan White; In the Finest Sense, He's a Survivor." *Washington Post*, January 15, 1989.
- Britton, Bonnie. "His Family's Perplexing Question: Why Ryan?" *Indianapolis Star*, August 4, 1985.
- Brodie, Mollyann, Elizabeth Hamel, Lee Ann Brady, Jennifer Kates, and Drew E. Altman. "AIDS at 21: Media Coverage of the AIDS Epidemic: 1981-2002." *Columbia Journalism Review* 42 (2004): S1-S8.
- Cadou, Jep. "Looking Back: Ryan White's Legal Battle Selected as Year's Top Story." *Indianapolis Star*, December 28, 1986.
- Caleca, Vic. "Farewell to a Friend." *Indianapolis Star*, April 12, 1990.
- Clendinen, Dudley. "Schools in New York Will Admit an AIDS Pupil But Not 3 Others." *New York Times*, September 8, 1985.
- Cohen, Bernard C. *The Press and Foreign Policy*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963.
- Dewar, Helen. "\$1.2 Billion AIDS Bill Nearing Senate Approval; Metropolitan Areas, States Would Split Funds." *Washington Post*, May 16, 1990.
- Editorial. "The Debate: AIDS & Discrimination; Protect the Victims from Discrimination." *USA Today*, June 24, 1988.
- Elliman, Jr., Donald M. "Publisher's Letter." *People*, December 28, 1987.
- Elrod, Carol. "Now a Household Word, AIDS is Invading 'Straight' World." *Indianapolis Star*, August 4, 1985.
- Esper, George. "Finding Pals." *Indianapolis Star*, October 18, 1987.

- Fauci, Anthony S. "The Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome." *Journal of the American Medical Association* 249 (1983): 2375-76.
- Fenton, K.A., and R.O. Valdiserri. "Twenty-Five Years of HIV/AIDS—United States, 1981-2006." *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 55 (2006): 585-89.
- Friedman, Jack, and Bill Shaw. "Amazing Grace." *People*, May 30, 1988.
- Friedman, Jack, and David Van Biema. "Breaking America's Heart." *People*, August 3, 1987.
- Garrison, Bob, and Alan Flippen. "White's Speak at AIDS Conference." *Kokomo Tribune*, February 8, 1987.
- Hastings, Janet. "Ryan's Mom Speaks Out About Fears, Reality of AIDS." *Indianapolis News*, February 7, 1987.
- Herek, Gregory M., and John P. Capitanio. "AIDS Stigma and Sexual Prejudice." *American Behavioral Scientist* 42, no. 7 (1999): 1126-43.
- Hill, Michael E. "Judith Light: May She Never Say Never Again." *Washington Post*, January 15, 1989.
- Howard County, Indiana, Memory Project. See under "Ryan White." Accessed September 6, 2013. <http://www.howardcountymemory.net>
- Indianapolis Newspapers Database, 1848-1991. Index, *Indianapolis Star* and *Indianapolis News*, 1985 to 1990. See under "Ryan White" and "Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome." Accessed February 17, 2008. http://208.119.135.17/db/indpls_news_1848_1991/1848_1991_results.asp
- Indianapolis Star*. "A History of the *Indianapolis Star*." Accessed March 2, 2008. <http://www2.indystar.com/library/factfiles/star/history/history.html>
- Jacobson, Sherry. "AIDS Haunts Hemophiliacs." *USA Today*, April 12, 1990.
- Jacobson, Sherry. "Despite Ryan White, AIDS Discrimination Spreads." *USA Today*, April 10, 1990.
- Jarrett, Paula. "Classmates Mourn Ryan White." *USA Today*, April 10, 1990.
- Jefferson, David, and Ramin Setoodeh. "How AIDS Changed America." *Newsweek*, May 15, 2006.
- Johnson, Dirk. "Ryan White Dies of AIDS at 18; His Struggle Helped Pierce Myths," *New York Times*, April 9, 1990. Accessed August 18, 2013. <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/04/09/obituaries/ryan-white-dies-of-aids-at-18-his-struggle-helped-pierce-myths.html?ref=dirkjohnson>
- Jones, Jr., Landon Y. "Editor's Letter." *People*, December 31, 1990.

- Kaiser Health News' Daily Report. "The Kaiser Daily HIV/AIDS Report Examines Early Media Reporting on AIDS, 20 Years Later." Accessed August 18, 2013.
<http://www.kaiserhealthnews.org/Daily-Reports/2001/June/04/dr00004944>
- Kalette, Denise, Mark Spearman, and Steven Findley. "New Testing Would Save Other Kids." *USA Today*, August 1, 1985.
- Kaull, Mary. "Teen AIDS Victim Returns to School; Lawyers to Appeal." *USA Today*, April 11, 1986.
- Keen, Judy. "Ryan: How You Live That Counts." *USA Today*, April 9, 1990.
- Keen, Judy, and Desda Moss. "Ryan White Fights for His Life." *USA Today*, April 2, 1990.
- Kierstead, Robert L. "Placing an Unwarranted Stigma on a Community." *Boston Globe*, May 21, 1990.
- Kimmelman, Michael. "Bitter Harvest: AIDS and the Arts." *New York Times*, March 19, 1989.
- Kinkade, Kris. "Rosselot Is One of Ryan's Big Rooters." *Kokomo Tribune*, April 4, 1990.
- Kinsella, James. *Covering the Plague: AIDS and the American Media*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989.
- Kokomo-Howard County Public Library. Index, *Kokomo Tribune*, 1985 to 1990. See under "Ryan White," "AIDS," and "Jeanne White." Accessed February 17, 2008.
<http://www.kokomo.lib.in.us/ayasd/newspaperIndex.html>
- "KT Streettalk: Do You Agree with Western's Rule Barring an AIDS Pupil?" *Kokomo Tribune*, August 12, 1985.
- Lambert, Bruce. "U.S. Confronting AIDS with Sense of Realism." *New York Times*, February 17, 1988.
- Leavitt, David. "The Way I Live Now." *New York Times*, July 9, 1989.
 Accessed October 10, 2013.
<http://www.nytimes.com/1989/07/09/magazine/the-way-i-live-now.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>
- "Letterline." *USA Today*, September 23, 1987.
- Lexis Nexis® Academic database. Index, *New York Times*, 1985 to 1990. See under "Ryan White." Accessed September 6, 2013.
<http://www.lexisnexis.com.proxy.library.ohiou.edu/>
- Lexis Nexis® Academic database. Index, *Washington Post*, 1985 to 1990. See under "Ryan White." Accessed September 6, 2013.
<http://www.lexisnexis.com.proxy.library.ohiou.edu/>




- MacNeil, Christopher M. "Blood Testing Finds No AIDS." *Kokomo Tribune*, April 7, 1985.
- MacNeil, Christopher M. "School Bars Door to Youth with AIDS." *Kokomo Tribune*, July 31, 1985.
- "Mail." *People*, August 24, 1987.
- "Mail." *People*, June 20, 1988.
- Marchand, Steve. "Local Youth Faces AIDS." *Kokomo Tribune*, March 3, 1985.
- Mattox Berry, Cheryl. "AIDS Victim Tells His Story; Compassion Conquers Ostracism." *USA Today*, March 4, 1988.
- Mattox Berry, Cheryl. "AIDS Victim's Return to Class Resisted." *USA Today*, February 21, 1986.
- McCombs, Maxwell E., and Donald L. Shaw. "The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (1972): 176-87.
- McGrory, Mary. "The Spread of Fear." *Washington Post*, September 17, 1985.
- Miley, Scott. "Ryan White Film Flops in Kokomo." *Indianapolis Star*, January 18, 1989.
- National Minority Health Care Foundation. "Modernizing the Ryan White CARE Act." Accessed July 2, 2008. <http://www.ryanwhitecareact.org/about/>
- Nelkin, Dorothy. "AIDS and the News Media." *The Milbank Quarterly* 69, no. 2 (1991): 293-307.
- NewsBank®. Index, *USA Today*, 1985 to 1990. See under "Ryan White." Accessed September 6, 2013. <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.proxy.library.ohiou.edu>
- Nichols, Mark. Telephone interview by Andrew J. Heger, March 4, 2008.
- Nichols, Mark. "Young AIDS Victim Barred from School." *Indianapolis Star*, July 31, 1985.
- Norberg, John. "AIDS, School and Ryan White; People Friendlier in a New City." *USA Today*, August 28, 1987.
- O'Connor, John J. "Review/Television; AIDS and Hemophilia." *New York Times*, January 16, 1989.
- "Passages 1990." *USA Today*, December 27, 1990.
- Pearson, Richard. "AIDS Patient Ryan White Dies; Indiana Youth's Plight Touched a Nation." *Washington Post*, April 9, 1990.

- People.com. Index, *People*, 1987 to 1990. See under "Ryan White." Accessed September 6, 2013. <http://search.people.com>.
- Photograph, *Indianapolis Star*, April 9, 1990.
- Photographs, *Indianapolis Star*, April 12, 1990.
- Plough, Alonzo, and Sheldon Krinsky. "The Emergence of Risk Communication Studies: Social and Political Context." *Science, Technology, and Human Values* 12, nos. 3-4 (1987): 4-10.
- Price, Nelson. "Ryan White: Calling His Own Shots." *Indianapolis News*, April 22, 1986.
- Price, Nelson. Telephone interview by Andrew J. Heger, March 2, 2008.
- Ramey, M.G. "AIDS Victim 'Just Like Any Boy His Age.'" *USA Today*, September 18, 1985.
- Rasky, Susan. "How the Politics Shifted on AIDS Funds." *New York Times*, May 20, 1990.
- Reagan, Ronald. "We Owe It to Ryan." *Washington Post*, April 11, 1990.
- "Remembering Ryan." *Indianapolis News*, April 12, 1990.
- Restak, Richard. "Worry About Survival of Society First; Then AIDS Victims' Rights." *Washington Post*, September 8, 1985.
- Robinson, David. "He Should Have Spoken Sooner." *Washington Post*, April 14, 1990.
- Rogers, Everett M., and James W. Dearing. "Agenda-Setting Research: Where Has It Been? Where Is It Going?" *Communication Yearbook* 11 (1988): 555-94.
- Rogers, Everett M., James W. Dearing, and Soonbum Chang. "AIDS in the 1980s: The Agenda-Setting Process for a Public Issue." *Journalism Monographs* 126 (April 1991): 1-47.
- Rosenberg, Beth L. "AIDS Victim Plans Move to Cicero." *Indianapolis Star*, May 1, 1987.
- RyanWhite.com. "A Timeline of Key Events in Ryan's Life." Accessed February 24, 2008. <http://www.ryanwhite.com/pages/story.html>
- RyanWhite.com. "Ryan's Story." Accessed February 24, 2008. <http://www.ryanwhite.com/pages/story.html>
- "Ryan White's 5-year Battle." *Indianapolis News*, April 9, 1990.
- Schellenberg, E. Glenn, Janet M. Keil, and Sandra L. Bem. "Innocent Victims of AIDS: Identifying the Subtext." *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 25, (1995): 1790-1800.

- Shaw, Bill. "Candle in the Wind." *People*, April 23, 1990.
- Shilts, Randy. *And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987.
- Shoemaker, Pamela J., and Stephen D. Reese. *Mediating the Message: Theories of Influences on Mass Media Content*. White Plains, New York: Longman Publishers, 1996.
- Shoemaker, Pamela J., with Elizabeth Kay Mayfield. "Building a Theory of News Content: A Synthesis of Current Approaches." *Journalism Monographs* 103 (June 1987): 1-36.
- Singhal, Arvind, and Everett M. Rogers. *Combating AIDS: Communication Strategies in Action*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2003.
- Smith, Brian D. "Season on the Rink." *Indianapolis Monthly*, April 1, 1989.
- Smith, Scott "The Year the Media Came to Town." *Kokomo Tribune*, September 25, 2006.
- Spalding, Julia. "Boy Wonder." *Indianapolis Monthly*, December 1, 1989.
- Specter, Michael. "AIDS Victim's Right to Attend Public School Tested in Corn Belt." *Washington Post*, September 3, 1985.
- Specter, Michael. "Disease Brings Fear, Bias Against AIDS Victims; Others Needlessly Refuse to Associate with Patients, Say Civil Rights, Gay Groups." *Washington Post*, August 2, 1985.
- Staff Reports. "Addenda." *Washington Post*, April 3, 1990.
- Staff Reports. "Boy with AIDS Welcomed." *Washington Post*, September 1, 1987.
- Staff Reports. "Indiana Student Has Smooth Transition." *Washington Post*, August 30, 1987.
- Stevens, Robin C., and Shawnika J. Hull. "The Colour of AIDS: An Analysis of Newspaper Coverage of HIV/AIDS in the United States from 1992–2007." *Critical Arts* 27, no. 3 (2013): 352-69.
- Stuteville, George. "The Legacy of Ryan White." *Indianapolis Star*, December 6, 1990.
- Tierney, John. "At Conference on AIDS, the Talk is of Lobbying." *New York Times*, October 25, 1990.
- Treichler, Paula A. *How to Have Theory in an Epidemic: Cultural Chronicles of AIDS*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press Books, 1999.
- Tye, Larry. "White's Death Finally Hits Home." *Boston Globe*, April 10, 1990.

- United Press International. "Indiana Judge Allows AIDS Victim Back Into School." *New York Times*, April 11, 1986.
- U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "What is HIV?" Accessed August 8, 2013. <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics/whatishiv.html>
- White, Jeanne. "Editorial." *USA Today*, September 18, 1990.
- White, Jeanne, with Beverly K. Bell. "Jeanne White Remembers . . ." *Indianapolis Monthly*, June 1, 1990.
- White-Ginder, Jeanne. Telephone interview by Andrew J. Heger, March 5, 2008.
- Wiethop, Dave. "AIDS Movie Stirs Opposing Emotions." *Kokomo Tribune*, January 17, 1989.
- Wiles, John. Telephone interview by Andrew J. Heger, March 6, 2008.
- Williams, Frances D. "Family Finds Life Free of Fear; Sons Have AIDS Virus." *USA Today*, April 10, 1989.
- Wright, Jeanne. "Elton John Sings for AIDS Children." *USA Today*, July 11, 1988.
- Yamasaki, Taro. "20 Years: AIDS & Photography." *The Digital Journalist*. Accessed March 8, 2008. http://digitaljournalist.org/issue0106/voices_yamasaki.htm

APPENDIX: INSTITUTIONAL BOARD REVIEW APPROVAL

 OHIO UNIVERSITY <small>Office of the Vice President for Research</small>	13E217
<small>Office of Research Compliance BTEC 110 Athens, OH 45701-2073 T: 740.503.0654 F: 740.503.0618 www.research.ohio.edu</small>	<p>A determination has been made that the following research study is exempt from IRB review because it involves:</p> <p>Category 2 research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior</p>
Project Title:	Portrait of a Pioneer: An Analysis of Print Media Coverage of Ryan White, 1985-1990
Primary Investigator:	Andrew John Heger
Co-Investigator(s):	
Advisor: <small>(if applicable)</small>	Michael Sweeney, Ph.D.
Department:	Journalism (Master's Candidate)
 Robin Stack, CIP, Human Subjects Research Coordinator Office of Research Compliance	 Date
<small>The approval remains in effect provided the study is conducted exactly as described in your application for review. Any additions or modifications to the project must be approved (as an amendment) prior to implementation.</small>	



OHIO
UNIVERSITY

Thesis and Dissertation Services