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## Why Me?

- Houston and OKC Pride
  - Board Member and Festival Chair
- NAACP
  - Observer
- Past Chair ASCLS-Diversity Advocacy Council
  - Glenda Price Diversity in Leadership Award
  - P.R.I.S.M. Event
- DLO Diversity and Inclusion Council
  - Charter Member
  - Forum Creator
- Activist since 1998



There are no experts, only experiences.

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## Conflict of Interest:

There is no conflict of interest for this presentation, however, all views and opinions expressed are that of the author and do not represent that of the authors employers or any other associated organizations.

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## Objectives:

- Summarize the history of oppression resulting from pandemics and disease.
- Identify the current discrimination resulting from COVID-19.
- Evaluate methods in which to confront or prevent weaponization of disease.
- Challenge ourselves to be a positive force of communication, even in the most difficult of circumstances.

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## How are diseases weaponized?

- Weapons are intended to do harm
  - Not including poor or pre-modern science
- Biological Warfare
- Experimentation without consent
- Direct Discrimination
  - Those infected
  - Those accused of being infected
  - Those accused of being the cause of infection
    - Religious or Racial
- Indirect Discrimination
  - Stigmatization
- Withholding of treatment/healthcare
- Random Acts of Violence/Abuse
- Combination of the above



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## Pandora's Box\*:

- Hesiod
  - Ancient Greece circa 750 B.C.
  - *Theogony*
  - *Works and Days*
- Pandora's creation herself is a punishment to man from Zeus
  - Prometheus stole fire from heaven to give to man
  - Given the jar for "safe-keeping"
  - Laid or tricked her husband to open the box
  - All the world's evils unleashed
    - Plague/illness
  - "For from her [Pandora] is the race of women and female kind: of her is the deadly race and tribe of women who live amongst mortal men to their great trouble, no helpmeets [wives] in hateful poverty, but only in wealth." –Hesiod



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### Black Death:

- Bubonic Plague
  - *Yersinia Pestis*
- Estimated to have reduced the world population by 350-475 million in the 14<sup>th</sup> century.
- Due to social and religious practices, Jews were less affected.
  - Bathing before the Sabbath
  - Cleansing of the dead
  - Isolated in ghettos
- Religious (Catholic) zealously and fanaticism flourished in the wake of destruction and death.
- Jews predominantly blamed for "poisoning" the Christian populations
  - By 1351, 210 Jewish communities had been exterminated
  - Romani and other foreigners were also persecuted.
- Many survivors relocated to Northeastern Europe where there was more religious tolerance.



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### Poland & Lithuania\*



- Spoiler Alert: This will come up again later

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### Leprosy (Hansen's Disease):



- *Mycobacterium leprae*
  - Most common spread through direct contact
  - Poverty is a major factor
  - Spread along migration, colonization, and slave trade routes.
  - Greatly feared due to visible disfigurement and disability
    - Thought very contagious
- In many cultures and religions, this was inflicted on the "sinful and impure"
- Lazar house
  - Lazarus; Patron Saint of the afflicted
- Total isolation with no legal rights and no ability to "rejoin" society if cured.
  - Many laws passed from restricted marriage to loss of all property

Spinalonga on Crete, Greece, one of the last leprosy colonies in Europe, closed in 1957. However, there are still 13 government ran Leprosy "centers" in Japan today.

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### Smallpox\*:



- Documentation of British Empire among others using smallpox corpses and belongings as biological weapons throughout history.
  - Native American and Aboriginal Tribes
  - Played a significant factor in the expansion of colonial forces into Native territories
- In the Battles of Boston and Quebec, British intentionally sent smallpox infected civilians and prostitutes to the American front lines.
- As a result of smallpox spread during pre-revolutionary battles, in 1777 George Washington mandates all troops be inoculated
  - "Necessity not only authorizes but seems to require the measure, for should the disorder infect the Army . . . we should have more to dread from it, than from the Sword of the Enemy."

Letters and their postscripts between Amherst and Bouquet  
 General Amherst, July 9<sup>th</sup> PS: Could it not be contrived to send the Small Pox among those Disaffected Tribes of Indians? We must, on this occasion, Use Every Stratagem in our power to Reduce them.  
 Colonel Bouquet, July 13. PS: I will try to inoculate the Indians by means of Blankets that may fall in their hands, taking care however not to get the disease myself.  
 Amherst, July 16. PS: You will Do well to try to inoculate the Indians by means of Blankets, as well as to try Every other method that can serve to Exterminate this execrable Race.  
 Bouquet, July 19. The signal for Indian Messengers, and all your Directions will be observed.  
 — Papers of Col. Henry Bouquet, ed. Stevens and Kent, ser. 21634, p. 161.

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### 1918 Influenza Pandemic:



- Most studies agree the first cases originated from Kansas, USA.
- Due to WWI propaganda, news of the flu was censored except in neutral countries where there was still a free press.
- Spain was the first to report openly in detail about the pandemic; referring to it as the "French flu"
- In France= American Flu; Russia= Kirghiz(Turkish) Flu; Germany= Flanders/Hlemish Flu; Brazil= German Flu; Senegal=Brazilian Flu; Africa= White Man Sickness or Negro disease
- US and Britain cited Spanish press and referred to it as Spanish Flu.
- Due to lack of reporting, misinformation spread rapidly.

As Dangerous as Poison Gas Shell  
**SPREAD OF SPANISH INFLUENZA  
 MENACES OUR WAR PRODUCTION**

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### Nazi Medical Experiments:

- Primary victims were Polish, Lithuanian, and Soviet POWs and Jews
- Experiments included:
  - Malaria
  - Tetanus
  - Jaundice
  - Typhus
  - Tuberculosis
  - Yellow Fever
  - Hepatitis
  - Blood Coagulation
- Most were investigated post-mortem
- Rare successful immunization experiments
  - Survivors were left with scars and long-term effects

"Jews were the festering appendix in the body of Europe." -Unnamed SS Doctor, Nuremberg Trials  
 "These researches . . . can be performed by us with particular efficiency because I personally assumed the responsibility for supplying aocial individuals and criminals who deserve only to die from concentration camps for these experiments." -Heinrich Hammler



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### Tuskegee Experiment:

*Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Negro Male*



- Ran from 1932-1972
- Was a continuation of 1900-1920s experiments in Oslo and Germany
  - Oslo- retrospective study
  - Germany
- 600 participants, male, impoverished, African-American sharecroppers
  - "Unintelligent"
  - "Promiscuous"
- 399 had latent syphilis, 201 control group
- Was informed the study would only last for 6 months
  - Would receive free medical care
  - Was given placebos, known ineffective treatments for "bad blood"
- Never told of their diagnosis
- Syphilis was never treated
  - 28 died from syphilis
  - 100 died from related complications
  - 40 wives were infected
  - 28 children contracted congenital syphilis
- Guatemalan syphilis experiment
  - 1946-1948

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### HIV/AIDS:



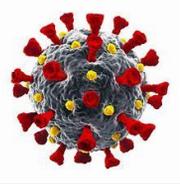
- Junkie Pneumonia
  - Retrospective and Anecdotal
- GRID
  - Gay-Related Immune Deficiency
  - New York Times
  - Gay Plague
  - Gay Cancer
  - Homosexual Syndrome
- Despite over half of documented cases in 1982 not being homosexual men
- AIDS Denialism
  - Ignoring
    - Not mentioned publicly by Reagan until 1985
- Homophobia
  - Fearmongering
  - Religious Right Groups
  - Stigmatization
  - Media and Entertainment

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I WILL NOT GO TO  
YOUR FUNERAL WHEN  
YOU DIE OF AIDS.

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### SARS-CoV-2/Covid-19:



- Asian/AAPI Discrimination
  - "China Virus"
  - Violence
- Discrepancy/Inconsistency in Access to Healthcare
  - Social
  - Financial
  - Race
    - BLM Movement
- Denialism
  - Virus
  - Vaccine
- Political Divide
  - Financial Motivations
- Internet/Social Media
  - Disinformation
    - Cherry Picking Data
    - Lies for view-counts
    - Sponsors

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SO, WHAT CAN WE DO?

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### If you see something, say something.

- Become an Ally:
  - Someone who associates, cooperates, and supports another by mutual relationship and respect.
  - Progress is never made solely by those affected.
- Create a Safe Space:
  - A place or environment in which a person or category of people can feel confident that they will not be exposed to discrimination, criticism, harassment, or any other emotional or physical harm.
- Ignorance can not be fought by ignoring.



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## Have a conversation.

- Don't argue or fight.
  - Be able to hit the "pause" button.
  - Be able to walk away.
- Avoid social media "wormholes."
  - Memes or 280 characters have yet to change someone's mind.
  - Internet trolls
- Have a genuine discussion.
  - Speak only from your perspective or experience.
  - Nobody is the spokesperson.
- Analyze the data



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## Educate yourself.

- Like with any subject
  - Language
    - Glossary
    - Definitions
- Discover history
- Use multiple resources
  - Different media outlets
  - Check sources
- Ask difficult questions
  - Be okay if the answer is:
    - No
    - Something you disagree with
    - Not getting one



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## Have empathy.

- Unlearning a behavior
  - Breaking a habit
  - Emotional and jarring moment
- For those you are defending
- If you are not okay with it happening to you:
  - Don't do it
  - Let it happen to someone else
- Don't compare/contrast experiences
  - Not a competition



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## Recognize your own flaws.

- Bias
  - Conscious
  - Unconscious
    - Check your "Blind Spots"
    - Close your eyes\*
- Look around you
  - Friends
  - Coworkers
- Take responsibility when you have done wrong
  - Apologize
  - Learn from it
  - Take appropriate action
- Realize when it's not about you
  - Don't add the burden of assuring you



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## Evaluate your ethics.

- Examine your own beliefs and customs
  - Who do you want to be?
    - Why?
- Review your social and cultural environments
  - Does the world you live in look like the world outside of it?
    - Do you want it to change?
- Reconsider any absolutes
  - Where did they come from?
  - Are you excluding people or ideas?
- Let your feelings guide you
  - Guilt?
  - Uncomfortable?
  - Confident?
  - Nothing?
- Perform regularly and TAKE NOTES.



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## Challenge yourself.

- Research demographics
  - Compare to environment
- Participate in diversity events
  - Volunteer
- Support diverse businesses
- Use proper terminology
  - Pronouns
  - Removed outdated language
- Ask questions
  - What is preventing equality in \_\_\_\_\_?
    - Financial access
    - Educational opportunities
- Make a difference



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### Final thoughts:

- According to the Hesiod myth, Pandora's box also contained hope.
- Despite the horrific history, there is still progress.
- Progress is difficult.
- As Laboratory Professionals:
  - Scientific knowledge
  - Disease states
  - Vectors
  - Critical thinking skills
  - The desire to help/heal
- Make yourself proud.

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