

Connecting Panels and People:
the AIDS Quilt's outreach across space and time

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Panel for Marvin Feldman, created by Cleve Jones in 1987*

The AIDS Memorial Quilt (The NAMES Project) is the largest community arts project in the world. Each panel features the name(s) of people who died as a result of AIDS, today there is estimated to be approximately over 50,000 panels of the Quilt.

Thanksgiving 1985, following the murders of gay community leader, Harvey Milk, and progressive San Francisco Mayor, George Mascone, activist Cleve Jones had organized a candlelight march. The gay community was overtaken by loss of leaders, and loss of community from a virus that disproportionately spreads through men who have sex with men (MSM). Jones encouraged marchers to write their deceased loved ones’ names on signs, which were stuck to the SF Federal Building at the end. In looking at this display of names, he imagined a quilt.

In 1987, a best friend of Jones, Marvin Feldman, had died from AIDS. Jones and friends took spray paint and fabric, creating the first panel of the AIDS Quilt. As the project took off, panels were submitted from all over the U.S.; notably 2,000 were laid across the National Mall in 1996 to protest government inaction. All panels are accepted so long as they meet the 3’x6’ size requirement, which symbolizes the scale of caskets.

The AIDS Quilt on display in Washington, D.C., Oct. 11, 1996**



Statistics from 2025

1.2 million people

are estimated to live with HIV/AIDS

13% of them

are unaware of their HIV/AIDS status and need testing

- MSM were, and still are, the most affected population by HIV/AIDS
- Homophobia and the virus spread in tandem, contributing to sodomy laws and other policies which criminalized being gay in the 20th century
- Cultural stigmas contributed to untraditional ways of mourning, since gay lovers and friends were often not welcome at funerals, or had too many funerals to attend
- Jones knew that this epidemic needed a symbol, people needed a memorial, and the community needed a message to the government and greater public
- The 1987 and 1996 National Mall protests’ notoriety cements the AIDS Quilt in history, but the efforts to cure HIV/AIDS are ongoing, same as the death toll
- Until there is a universally accessible and effective cure, the AIDS Memorial Quilt continues to grow into the 21st century

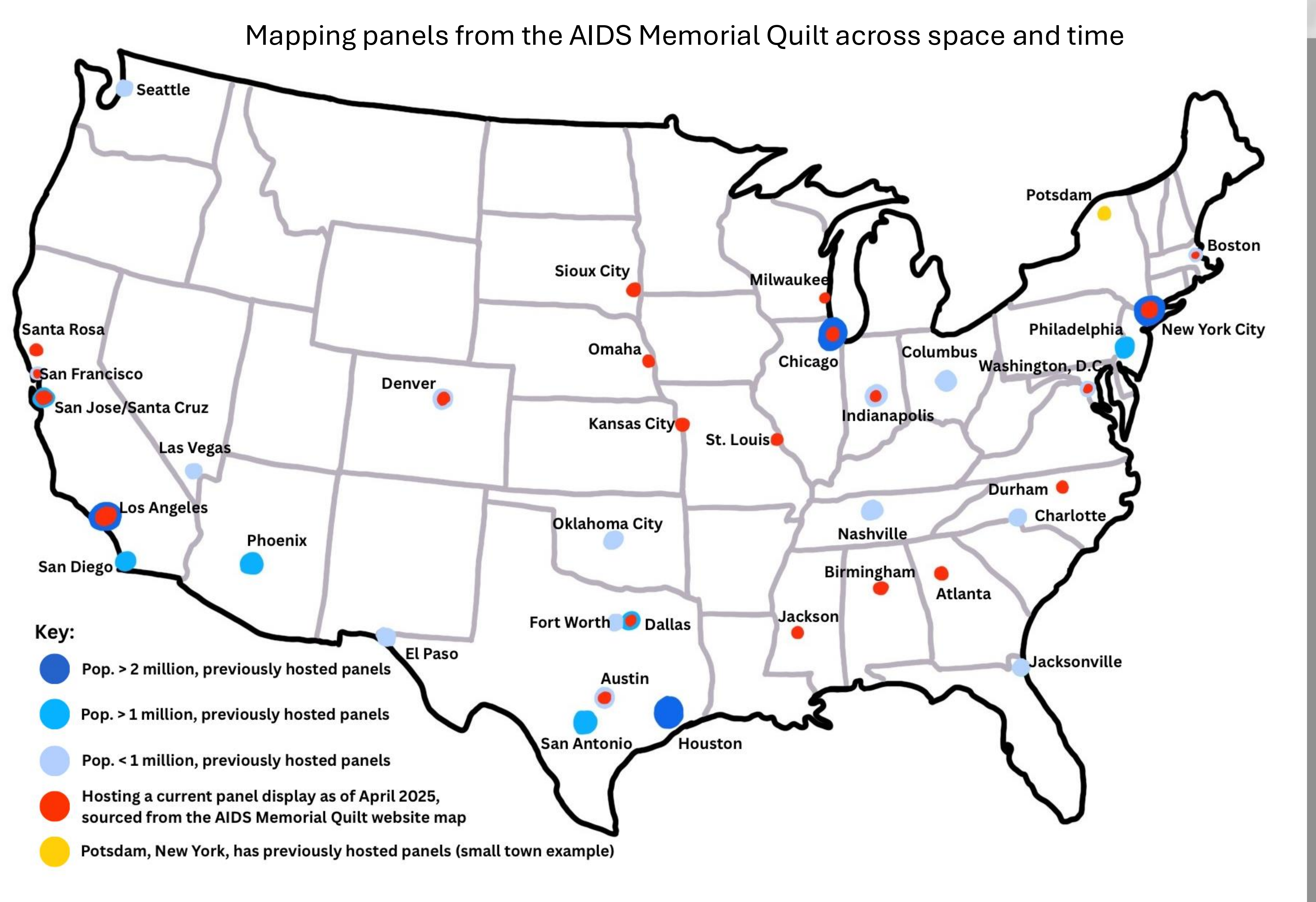
Research Question

How has the AIDS Memorial Quilt evolved over time to protest, memorialize, and educate about the ongoing HIV/AIDS crisis?

Methods (and Figure Descriptions)

- Historical review provides the context for the background and information about quilt panel displays
- The top 25 most populous American cities are gathered in Excel to catalogue data about recent panel displays
- By focusing on the largest cities, results about the Quilt's outreach are more generalizable
- The spreadsheet indicates the diversity of establishments that have hosted the quilt, as well as the recency of such displays
- Gathered information is then plugged into a map, which visualizes the Quilt's outreach (the blue dots)
- Red dots are added to indicate where current displays are according to the AIDS Memorial Quilt website
- One yellow dot indicates Potsdam, NY, which is an example of the Quilt's connection to small towns (not just big cities)
- Map usage makes this research multimodal, and symbolizes how the AIDS Memorial Quilt interconnects every corner of the United States

Top cities by pop.	Host establishment of panel displays	Most recent display dates	Population	Info Source(s)
New York City	The Whitney Museum of American Art	Sep. 25 2024 - Feb. 9, 2025	7,936,530	Artnet News
Los Angeles	Hollywood United Methodist Church	Apr. 22-30, 2023	3,820,914	Hollywood United Methodist Church
Chicago	Columbia College Chicago	Apr. 30 - May 13, 2025	2,611,867	Chicago Sun Times
Houston	The MAG (Art Gallery)	May 3-7, 2023	2,300,833	Out Smart Magazine
Phoenix	The Parson Health and Wellness Center	Dec. 1-3, 2015	1,583,690	12 News (NBC)
San Antonio	Woodlawn Pointe Community Center	Dec. 1-3, 2023	1,495,295	Get Creative San Antonio
Philadelphia	AIDS Fund Philly	Lends its panels to org.'s in Philly	1,517,114	AIDS Fund Philly
San Diego	Oceanside Public Library	Nov. 30 - Dec. 1, 2023	1,386,972	KPBS (news)
Dallas	The University of Texas at Arlington (UTA)	Nov. - Dec. 2, 2023	1,302,868	5 DFW (NBC)
Fort Worth	The University of Texas at Arlington (UTA)	Nov. - Dec. 2, 2023	978,468	5 DFW (NBC)
Jacksonville	Jacksonville City Hall	Week of Dec. 1, 2023	985,843	The Florida Times-Union
Austin	Change the Pattern	Lends its panels to org.'s in the South	989,252	Change the Pattern
San Jose	San Jose State University	May, 1989	1,359,000	SJSU King Library Digital Collections
Charlotte	University of North Carolina, Charlotte	Feb. 26, 1999	520,829	Charlotte Murray Atkinson Library
Columbus	Ohio State University	Apr. 12, 2019	899,908	OSU College of Arts and Sciences
Indianapolis	Indiana AIDS Fund	Organizes panel events through Indiana	874,037	Indiana AIDS Fund
San Francisco	San Francisco International Airport Museum	Feb. 8, 2025 - Mar. 22, 2026	767,968	SFO Museum
Seattle	University of Washington, Seattle	May, 1997	533,508	MOHAI Collections
Oklahoma City	St. Stephen's United Methodist Church	Sep. 17 - Oct. 1, 2014	621,673	Norman Transcript (news)
Denver	Cheesman Park	Aug. 29, 2024	715,891	Do303
Nashville	University of Tennessee	Nov. 8 - Dec. 3, 2021	678,134	UT Pride Center
Washington, d.c.	The White House	Dec. 5, 2024	684,394	Advocate News
El Paso	El Paso Museum of Art	Jun. 1-30, 2019	680,028	EPMA
Las Vegas	Headquarters of Aid for AIDS of Nevada	Apr. 24-30, 2013	599,739	Las Vegas Sun
Boston	UMass Boston	Nov. 30 - Dec. 4, 2015	670,962	Open Archives News
Key:				
Pop. > 2 million		Pop. = population		
Pop. > 1 million		Population counted according to year of panel displays, according to Census data		
Pop. < 1 million		Top cities listed by current population ranking, according to World Population Review		



Significance and Conclusion

Although modern medicine can treat HIV/AIDS, the lack of a cure means people are continuing to die from AIDS. The Quilt raises awareness for the devastating toll the virus has taken against MSM, and promotes opportunities to get tested. Everywhere in the U.S., people are connected to the AIDS Quilt through their panel submissions, or interaction with panels on temporary display. The NAMES Project's legacy of activism has influenced American culture to stop homophobia, find and fund solutions, and provide resources to those in need. As the AIDS Memorial Quilt asserts its presence in the 21st century, it continues to save lives.

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Images

"Panel for Marvin Feldman" sourced from *The Quilt, Stories From The NAMES Project*, written by Cindy Ruskin, photographs by Matt Herron, design by Deborah Zemke (1988)

"AIDS Quilt on display in Washington, D.C." and "Background Image" sourced from Stull, G. (2001). The AIDS Memorial Quilt: Performing memory, piecing action. *American Art*, 15(2), 84–89. Photograph by Paul Margolies

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