

Listen to Untold HIV Stories in “Blindspot: The Plague in the Shadows”

A new podcast series from WNYC and The History Channel explores the vulnerable communities where HIV first took root. [VIDEOS]

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“GRID,” “the Monster,” “the Gay Plague.” In the early 1980s in New York City, vulnerable communities had several names for the mysterious illness decimating their members, especially [African-American](#), [Latino](#) and [LGBTQ](#) people. Now known as [HIV](#), the virus that can progress to AIDS is the subject of Blindspot: The Plague in the Shadows, the latest season of a free podcast series coproduced by WNYC Studios, part of New York Public Radio, and The History Channel in collaboration with The Nation Magazine. (Previous Blindspot seasons explored [the road to 9/11](#) and [the 1921 massacre of a Black community in Tulsa, Oklahoma](#).)

Hosted by Kai Wright with lead reporting by Lizzy Ratner, [Blindspot: The Plague in the Shadows](#) looks at the early years of the epidemic, the places where HIV first took root and the people who refused to stay out of sight.

Shining a light on the untold stories from the epidemic, new episodes drop each Thursday. You can subscribe and listen to Blindspot: The Plague in the Shadows wherever you get podcasts: <https://bit.ly/3SrYt7s>. You can also listen to full episodes on YouTube: <https://bit.ly/47GhQxY>. The first two episodes are embedded below:

To coincide with the podcast, the New York venue The Green Space presents the exhibition [Photographs From Plague in the Shadows](#), a collection of portraits of several people featured in the podcast. The series is photographed by multidisciplinary artist and AIDS activist Kia LaBeija. It’s one of several HIV-related events marking LaBeija’s artist residency at the Green Space.

Here’s how [WNYC Studios describes season 3 of Blindspot](#):

“In the mid-1980s, the people of Valerie Reyes-Jiménez’s lower Manhattan neighborhood began to disappear. It had been a tight-knit Puerto Rican community, but, in recent years, it had become home to one of the city’s most infamous drug bazaars. At 20, Valerie had seen a lot, but nothing prepared her for the strange, stealthy illness that took 75 people from her

block in just a few short years. She and her friends called it...The Monster.

“Outside Valerie’s neighborhood, doctors had a different name for what was going on. They called it HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. By this point, this illness was widely recognized as the biggest contagious threat facing the United States, but its effect on communities like Valerie’s remained largely invisible. In this season of *Blindspot: The Plague in the Shadows*, we travel back to a pivotal moment in the history of this country, and we trace how, decades before COVID-19, a virus tore through some of our most vulnerable communities while the wider world looked away. We go to a pediatric ward in Harlem, a women’s prison in upstate New York, a drug market in the South Bronx, and the inner sanctum of the NIH [National Institutes of Health]. And we meet people who demanded that they, and their illness, be seen: mothers and children, doctors and nurses, nuns and sex workers, and a woman who literally helped change the definition of AIDS.

“HIV and AIDS changed the United States, and it changed the world. It has killed [some 40 million people](#), and continues to kill today; it was always as much a social disease, as it was a medical crisis. In this series, we will tell the story of some of the defining years of the epidemic—and we’ll consider, what part of the pain of this story could have been avoided? Most crucial of all, what lessons can we still learn from it today?”

And here’s more information about the HIV-related events at The Green Space:



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To read a 2022 POZ interview with LaBeija, who was born with HIV, and to check out more of her work, see “[Kia LaBeija, Artist and HIV Activist, Is Prepared for Her First Solo Show.](#)”