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## The Last Days of New York

by Paul Drye

It was late 1977 when the first cases started showing up. Everyone had seen *The Boy In The Plastic Bubble* the year before, so they had some idea about immune deficiency. A few New Yorkers, often poor, died of something mysterious, then a few more. Philadelphia and Los Angeles started seeing cases too, and then the bomb dropped. Just after Christmas the Center for Disease Control announced that the new disease was infectious by air, and that it had a very long incubation period -- sometimes as short as a few weeks, but others over six months and with the horizon climbing. Worse, the discovery had been made by statistical analysis of cases; at first there was no test for finding out who was still asymptomatic yet passing the disease on. Worse, there was no cure, and this acquired immune deficiency looked as if it would always be fatal in the long run.

Later work would show that the percentage of the American population already infected with Communicable Immune Deficiency was about ten percent, particularly concentrated in the large cities of the East and West Coast, and Chicago. Despite widespread efforts to set up "public barrier prevention" by distributing paper face masks and the like, that figure was over 20% when the first CID blood test was developed in September 1978 and it became clear just how widespread the problem was.

By then, about a half a million people had died, two million were obviously ill . . .

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