

Disaster—Black Outs of 1977 and 2003

**A. 1977 Blackout**

**1. What happened?**

- On Wednesday at 9:36pm, July 13, 1977 New York City experienced a blackout that cut off electricity through that night and well into the next day
- The blackout was caused by a lighting strike on a power line in Westchester County to the north. The power line went out and caused a massive power outage because the downed line placed too much demand on other lines that then needed to be shut off. Thus, the problem cascaded out of control resulting in a massive blackout.
- The blackout was defined by widespread looting and arson in the city's poorest neighborhoods
- During the late-1970s, the nation was in a deep recession and New York City had a high unemployment rate

**2. Who was impacted?**

- Traffic was congested without proper traffic lights and signals
- People were stranded on subways trains and in subway tunnels
- 828 million gallons of sewage was released into lakes and rivers

**3. How were immigrant groups or historically marginalized communities in the city impacted?**

- People living in high rise apartments were stranded without running water and air conditioning

**4. Quotes—what could have been done differently?**

- “New York City is a vertical city. There are people in apartment houses that are ten stories high. They don't have any water, they have no lights, and there is a sense of urgency,” person on PBS American Experience documentary, “Blackout.”

**B. 2003 Blackout**

**1. What happened?**

- Beginning at 4:11pm on Thursday August 14, 2003 was a massive power outage that affected about 50 million people from Michigan to New England to Quebec
- The blackout lasted for 31 hours

**2. Who was impacted?**

- 11,600 traffic signals went dark
- 413 subway trains stopped with 400,000 passengers aboard
- 800 elevator rescues were made
- Raw sewage was released into lakes and rivers as the loss of electric power shut down water waste treatment plants
- In New York City alone, eight million people were affected

- The economic loss to the city was estimated to be between \$700 million to \$1 billion
  - Fires in the city increased six-fold during the blackout, most of which were started by candles
- 3. How were immigrant groups or historically marginalized communities in the city impacted?**
- The elderly, injured, and children were affected most severely by the lack of air conditioning, as it was especially hot August 14th-15th.
  - High rise apartments were without water because they rely on electric pumps to move water to the upper floors
  - Though hospitals and other care facilities learned from 9/11 and used backup generators, some noted that generators broke down or ran out of fuel forcing them to move patients to other hospitals.
- **Quotes—what could have been done differently?**
- “I thought I was going to die. You could hear the rats running around. Children were falling on top of each other. People were screaming. Old ladies were crying,” said Ana Sorio of Queens regarding those stuck on the subway train.
  - “Everybody is blowing generators. I’m shocked at what I’m seeing. And I’m troubled. For all the yelling and screaming that everybody did after 9/11, there is nothing forthcoming to help us shore up this infrastructure,” said Mr. David P. Rosen, president of Jamaica Hospital in Queens.
  - “We sat there for an hour, suffocating. People started getting out. I jumped off the train with everybody else...it was terrifying,” said Maria Hiller of Madison, N.J. about being stuck on the A train.

## Disaster—September 11, 2001

### **1. What happened?**

- On Tuesday morning, September 11, 2001 Al-Qaeda-affiliated hijackers flew two Boeing 767 jets into the World Trade Centers within minutes of each other
- A million tons of dust reined down on Lower Manhattan
- The attacks resulted in substantial economic damage in terms of the physical destruction of buildings, infrastructure and equipment, and in the loss of jobs, wages, and business revenues

### **2. Who was impacted?**

- The Fiscal Policy Institute (FPI) reported that 60 percent of the jobs lost were held by workers earning low wages (\$11 or less)
- As of 2006, 40,000 responders and recovery workers were made sick by toxic material at ground zone
- According to the Queens County Economic Development Corporation, 28 percent of all unemployment claims in the city that were directly related to

the terrorist attack have come from Queens residents, many of those from airport-related layoffs.

**3. How were immigrant groups or historically marginalized communities in the city impacted?**

- Immigrants were disproportionately affected by September 11th-related job loss
- According to FPI, 56 percent of all September 11th-related job loss was among immigrant workers
- Four of the industries hardest hit in the aftermath—restaurants, hotels, building services, and apparel manufacturing—have very high immigrant densities.
- Undocumented immigrants were among the victims who died but because of their status their families were ineligible for federal aid
- Although many immigrants were victims of increased threats of deportation, Pakistanis were by far the most affected group.
- Before September 11<sup>th</sup>, an estimated 120,000 Pakistanis lived in Brooklyn. By 2003, between 40 and 50 percent of Pakistanis were detained or deported or left on their own.

**4. Quotes—what could have been done differently?**

- “They ask for a Social Security number. They ask me if I work, and when I say no, they think I won’t be able to pay for the apartment,” said a 25-year-old widow in Queens whose undocumented husband disappeared after the attacks that day.
- “Even with the papers, people are scared of what’s going on and they feel it’s safer to move somewhere else,” said Mohammad Iqbal, 45, who owns the New Apna Bazaar on Coney Island Avenue
- “This is a significant failure of the public health system,” responded Micki Siegel de Hernandez, health and safety director for District I of the Communications Workers of America, to the city’s five-year delay of diagnostic guidelines for unusual illnesses linked to ground zone dust.

Disaster—Super Storm Sandy

**1. What happened?**

- Hurricane Sandy hit New York City on October 29, 2012
- Resulted in 97 deaths in the New York Metropolitan area, 43 of which were in New York City

**2. Who was impacted?**

- Although all five boroughs experienced flooding, the worst was located in Staten Island, southern Brooklyn, and the lower third of Manhattan.
- Produced major power outages and severe flooding, including flooding of the MTA subway
- 800,000 New Yorkers lost electricity

- Tens of thousands of New Yorkers were displaced
- 3. How were immigrant groups or historically marginalized communities in the city impacted?**
- Sandy was not experienced equally across all communities
  - Over 400 public housing buildings—home to almost 80,000 residents—lost electricity, elevators, heat, and hot water
  - Almost half of those who died due to Hurricane Sandy were over 65
- 4. Quotes—what could have been done differently?**
- “The 19<sup>th</sup> floor, sometimes it has its advantages: you look out, in the night, it’s really pretty. But when you’re stuck up here for days and you just look outside and feel like a prisoner,” said then 18 year old Nilejawel Stora