

Blackout evokes decency, kindness from New Yorkers

Consider this letter a clarification of sorts.

Despite what the media would have you believe — that the Blackout of 2003 “wreaked havoc” upon Northeastern America, that our nation showed its vulnerability to terrorism, that New York City was reduced to a sweltering mass of chaos — August’s power blip was nothing but that: a blip.

GUEST COMMENTARY

Being a temporary resident of New York City (Harlem’s Sugar Hill, specifically), I was one of millions who found themselves stuck in Midtown at the end of the business day. And I was also one of millions who realized that nothing could be done and calmly began walking home. (To be fair, the walk was probably the worst part, being as that I was near 23rd Street at the time of the surge and reside at 153rd.)

But the New York City of the 2003 Blackout was a far cry from the same town that imploded under similar circumstances in 1977. Instead of reacting with looting, violence and a lack of regard for the law, New Yorkers treated each other with kindness and respect.

Some gave up on trying to get home immediately and instead helped direct traffic. Others provided their own personal flashlights to help guide those stuck in subway tunnels to daylight. Even the small stores and bodegas remained open, operating by candlelight and offering necessary supplies at a small discount. Suddenly everyone found themselves in the mutual position of finally having the opportunity to enjoy a nice walk home with 10 million of their closer neighbors — and I can’t even begin to count how many impromptu block parties and small gatherings I passed on my journey home. If anything, the events of that Thursday evening set the tone for the entire weekend, as city residents were urged to leave their apartment to avoid another air-conditioner overload and instead enjoy the local beaches and parks. Like most of Manhattan, I barbecued. And got drunk. And then barbecued some more.

So don’t believe the hype. We’re fine — New York’s a lot tougher than that. And hell, we all got a three-day weekend! Maybe this really is the greatest city in the world ...

Raechel M. Sims, a former University student, lives in Grants Pass.

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