



“Challenging People to Shape a Better Future Now”

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‘Occupy Sandy’ Outperforms FEMA

STATELESS SOCIETY

Trevor Hultner

Remember two months ago, on the anniversary of Occupy Wall Street’s insertion into national and popular culture, when all the major media outlets declared Occupy dead?

Those very same media outlets had to swallow those words in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, when activists from OWS formed a new group — Occupy Sandy — to help afflicted communities in New York recover from the “superstorm’s” devastation.

They had to swallow their words again when Occupy Sandy began outperforming organizations whose very job it is to help communities bounce back after disasters. When the Federal Emergency Management Agency shut its doors at the onset of a second storm, a Nor’easter, blowing through New York City, Occupy Sandy picked up their slack.

This became such a big deal that even the New York Times — which historically has not been very kind to movements centered around highlighting economic inequality — could not ignore it:

“Maligned for months for its purported ineffectiveness, Occupy Wall Street has managed through its storm-related efforts not only to

renew the impromptu passions of Zuccotti, but also to tap into an unfulfilled desire among the residents of the city to assist in the recovery. This altruistic urge was the afflicted and to sort through a medieval marketplace of donated blankets, clothes and food. There is an Occupy motor pool of borrowed cars and pickup trucks that ferries volunteers to ravaged areas. An Occupy weatherman sits at his computer and issues regular forecasts. Occupy construction teams and medical committees have

ing people in the Lower Ninth Ward before FEMA or the Red Cross could even set up camp.

These ad hoc groups of activists and volunteers seem to work better than the government or NGOs, but why?

One possible reason is that the activists and volunteers are pulled from the affected communities themselves, rather than coming from without — therefore, they understand the neighborhoods they’re working in, know the people and can gauge their needs quickly. However, this is not always the case; Common Ground was started by four out-of-town street medics.

Another possibility is that horizontally organized groups based on the principles of free association and mutual aid are just superior to organizations steeped in bureaucracy. The evidence for this is growing rapidly, as more people take control of their own lives and help their neighbors during times of crisis, economic, ecological or otherwise.

Trevor Hultner is on the staff of the Center for a Stateless Society

‘This is not the first time grassroots, activist-based aid groups have outclassed both federal and non-profit disaster relief’

initially unmet by larger, more established charity groups, which seemed slow to deliver aid and turned away potential volunteers in droves during the early days of the disaster.

“In the past two weeks, Occupy Sandy has set up distribution sites at a pair of Brooklyn churches where hundreds of New Yorkers muster daily to cook hot meals for

been formed.”

This is not the first time grassroots, activist-based aid groups have outclassed both federal and non-profit disaster relief. Hurricane Katrina saw the formation of the Common Ground Relief Collective. That organization, founded with the principles of horizontal, voluntary association and direct action in mind, began help-

A Post-Election Mobilization Agenda

After we savor the feeling of sweet success that comes from President Barack Obama’s election, there is work to do. Most of us got the outcome that we both worked and hoped for, but we have to resist the temptation to exhale and get on with our work. Before the president takes the oath of office for a second time, African Americans should mobilize around these issues:

SEQUESTRATION. Unless the Democrats and Republicans can cut a deal during the lame-duck session of Congress, our budget will be cut automatically. While House Speaker John Boehner has softened his tone just a bit and indicated his willingness to compromise, he still has to herd his Tea Party colleagues into also agreeing on ways to avoid sequestration. The notion of cutting expenditures at a time of slow economic growth makes no sense. Neither does sequestration, a desperate move to avoid a compromise. What do we need to address the deficit? A long-term plan that takes economic cycles into account.

POVERTY. Tavis Smiley and Cornel West spent much of this fall on a poverty tour, rising up the 27 percent of African Americans who live in poverty. This contrasts with the Middle Class Tax Force that President Obama has asked Vice President Biden to lead. It would be great if the president would form a task force to reduce or eradicate poverty, and he might do so if he were urged to. Meanwhile, as the holidays approach, keep the poor in your community in mind, and find a local charity to sponsor.



BENNETT COLLEGE

Julianne Malveaux

STATE AND LOCAL ELECTIONS. Presidential elections seem to suck all of the air out of the political landscape, and rightly so. We elect a president only

are engaged.

THE HOUSING CRISIS. Despite action at the national level, many banks are dragging their feet rather than offering modifications for under water mortgages. Just a fraction of those who qualify for these mortgages have been offered them by their banks. Congress probably can’t deal with this issue during a lame duck session, but it is certainly time for people to get together to reverse this trend. The problem: Too many of us are ashamed to

African Americans have been President Obama’s most loyal supporters. When will we get the attention we deserve?

every four years, and his (maybe one day her) focus have long-term implications. But so do city council, school board and mayoral

talk about our financial status, thinking it’s a personal problem instead of a structural problem.

Many banks are dragging their feet rather than offering modifications for under water mortgages

elections. Many are held in off years so that local candidates don’t get swallowed in the national hype. It’s a great time to get involved in these elections or even consider running yourself. Voting is literally the least you can do, not the most you can do. Failing to engage in full civic participation cedes your choices to others who

The solution: Consider involving a state legislator or local leader in developing a workshop for those who are under water. Get bankers there to explain why so many have not been offered loan modifications. Take the results to your congressperson and ask them to act on it.

PARENT PLUS LOANS AND OTHER HIGHER EDUCATION ISSUES. While the federal government provides an opportunity for students to have parents borrow for their tuition, the federal government has tightened requirements on the loan to the point that nearly half of those who qualified last year do not qualify any more. The result? Thousands of student, especially at HBCUs have the choice to pay up or get out. Or, the other choice is for colleges to “carry” these students. This is a bad idea when regulators judge colleges, especially historically Black colleges, by fiscal stability. Speaking of education, this is a challenging time for HBCUs to experience cuts in Title III and other federally-sponsored programs. In a second Obama term, issues affecting HBCUs should be high on the list of things our president must pay attention to.

6. THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY. African Americans have been President Obama’s most loyal supporters. When will we get the attention we deserve? We can’t meekly ask for it, we have to demand it. With high Black unemployment rates, challenged inner city employment possibilities, and high dropout rates, our community is in desperate need of attention. The location of one federally funded new state-of-the-art high school, with both honors programs and job-training programs, can make a real difference in inner cities.

Julianne Malveaux is a Washington, D.C.-based economist and writer. She is President Emerita of Bennett College for Women in Greensboro, N.C.