

July 25, 1977 / \$1.00

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Newsweek

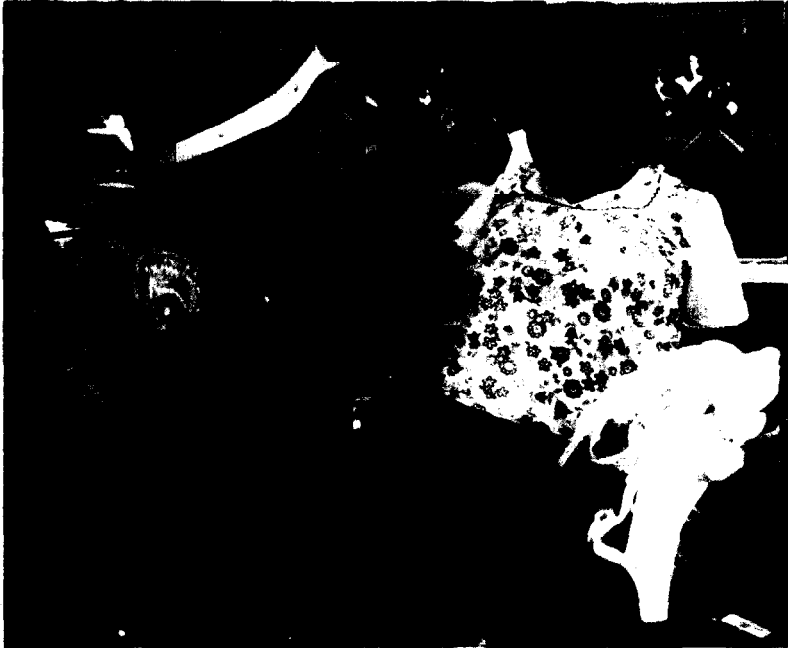
Special
Color
Report



BLACKOUT!

HEART OF DARKNESS

One hundred seven stories high over Manhattan, a group of diners at the World Trade Center's skyscraping restaurant *Windows on the World* downed their digestifs, took a last glance at the stunning lightshow below, and crowded into a waiting down elevator. The doors slid shut. The elevator didn't budge. Somebody stabbed irritably at the button. Nothing happened. Somebody else got the doors open and the passengers free. "The elevator's out," one of them huffily informed a white-jacketed captain. The captain shrugged toward the nightscape outside, gone suddenly inky black. "So's New York," he replied. ▶



Alex Webb—Magnum

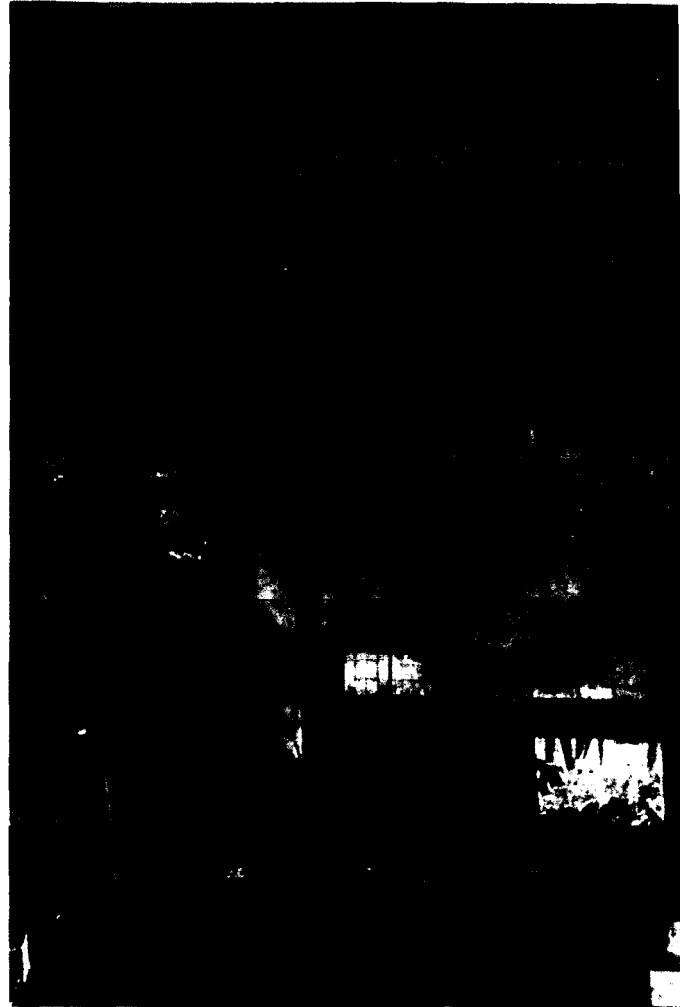
In Brooklyn, a cop confronts a tide of looting . . .

In sweltering Harlem, people were already in the streets when darkness fell, rapping, sipping wine, playing dominoes, catching the little flutters of breeze beneath the airless tenements. There was a throaty mass scream when the lights went out, and then a little festival of blackness-bonfires in the streets, a blast of soul and salsa, a torchlight parade down upper Broadway. But within minutes, the night was alight with fires, the pavement alive with looters, the music drowned out by whooping sirens and shattering glass. The pillaging ran until dawn, unchecked and unabashed. "Being that the lights are out and the niggers are going hungry," a black kid boasted, "we're going to take what we want-and what we want is what we need."

A pilot was nosing his cargo plane down through the moonlit night, bound for John F. Kennedy International Airport with a cargo of strawberries, when New York abruptly vanished beneath him. "Where is Kennedy airport?" he radioed helplessly. Head for Philadelphia, the control tower answered. "What am I supposed to do with the berries?" asked the captain. "Eat them," said the tower.

On a muggy dog-day evening last week, a vagrant summer storm knocked out high-voltage power lines in the near New York exurbs-and within the hour returned 9 million people to the dark, heat and disquiet of a pre-electric age. The big switch-off of '77 was no match in its sweep for the great blackout of '65—the epic November failure that blotted out much of the Northeastern United States and parts of a Canadian province as well. But for the 25 hours it lasted, it stopped commerce, stymied transportation, blackened the night, sheltered the lawless, turned high rises into prisons, made water a luxury and air conditioning a nostalgic memory. And it underscored once again the fragility of urban America in the last quarter of the twentieth century—a state of dependence so total that a burst of lightning could shut down the nation's largest city as surely and nearly as completely as a neutron bomb.

For a night and a day, nothing worked except telephones, transistor radios and a certain gritty New York resilience in the face of disaster. Subways ran dead. Elevators hung high in their shafts. Waterpumps failed, and with them sinks, tubs and toilets. Streetlights and stoplights went out. Traffic thinned and slowed to a wary crawl. Refrigerators and air coolers quit. Commuter lines stalled. Stores, banks, businesses and stock exchanges closed. Theaters went dark. Office towers stood nearly empty. Airports shut down. Hospitals switched to back-up generators when they worked-and flashlight medicine



. . . a factory at the eye of the fire storm belches

when they did not. Produce wilted and frozen food melted in stores. The stranded flaked out on hotel-lobby floors. The mayor held his first crisis councils by candlelight.

And in the ghettos and barrios of four of the city's five boroughs, the looters and burners owned the night, on a scale and with a fury unmatched since the riots of a decade ago (page 23). The blackout of '65 fell fortuitously in the cool of mid-autumn; criminals stayed home—there were only 96 arrests all night—and crime rates actually fell. But the switch-off of '77 caught black New York in the midst of the summer's worst heat wave and in the thrall of depression-level unemployment—and when the lights went out this time, the mean streets simply erupted. The arrest count exploded to a staggering 3,776 before the police largely gave up trying to collar the pillagers and concentrated on containing them. Two

In the control room, a Con Ed man ponders the problem of th

John Earle





Robert R. McElroy—Newsweek

clouds of smoke and tongues of flame . . .

looters died. More than 400 cops were hurt. The fire department was swamped with alarms-true and false. The jails were flooded to overflowing-so badly that the city had to reopen the condemned old prison known for its bleak-house aspect and its medieval living conditions as the Tombs.

A PLAGUE OF VIOLENCE

The "night of terror," in Mayor Abraham Beame's anguished phrase, spread from slum to slum out of Harlem to Bedford-Stuyvesant in Brooklyn, Jamaica in Queens and the down-and-out South Bronx-and in some neighborhoods flamed on into high-noon daylight. More than 2,000 stores were pillaged, and guestimates of property losses ran as high as \$1 billion-enough to qualify the stricken areas for Federal disasteraid. A mile and a half of Brooklyn's Broadway was put to the torch. Protective metal grills were tom off storefronts with crowbars, battered down with cars and dragged down by brute force. Teen-agers first, then grade-schoolers and grownups rifled shops and markets for clothes, appliances, furniture, television sets, groceries-even 50 Pontiacs from a Bronx dealership. One looter in Flatbush was caught returning a black-and-white TV for a color model. Others in Harlem set up shop in an abandoned store and retailed their loot, the offerings ranging from Pro-Keds sneakers for \$5 to color consoles for \$135. Hospital emergency rooms were jammed with the wounded-many of them cut in encounters with plate-glass windows.

The plague of violence was still in progress when the city began looking for someone to blame-and settled on the proximate



Gilles Peress—Magnum

. . . and police wrestle a suspect into a patrol car

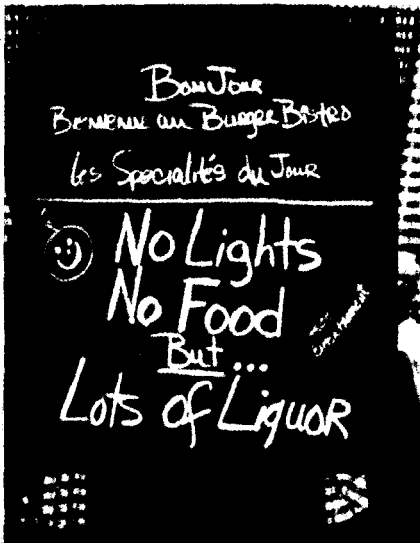
target, Consolidated Edison, the giant utility that powers New York and its Westchester County suburbs. Con Ed faulted "an act of God" for the blackout-four separate lightning strikes that hit its feeder lines in upper Westchester in less than an hour and set a chain reaction of switch-offs cascading southward to the city (page 27). But Mayor Beame, heating to a boil through the long delays at getting New York working again, called Con Edison's performance "at the very least gross negligence-and," he added opaquely, "at the worst something far more serious." In one bitter passage, he proposed that the utility's chairman, Charles F. Luce, be hanged; instead, he settled for a multiplicity of city, state and Federal investigations-the latter ordered on the spot by Jimmy Carter and begun with the unspoken premise that there might be something to Beame's charge of negligence.

THE CLOCKS STOPPED AT 9:34

The disaster, wherever the blame lay, was nearly total-us if, thought one visiting businessman riding in from La Guardia Airport, *someone just blew out a candle all over the city.* Lights blinked off; TV pictures shrank and died; clocks stopped between 9:34 and 9:40. From the Palisades across the Hudson River, New Jersey residents-themselves untouched-watched the great Manhattan skyline disappear into jagged blackness, lit only by the red aircraft beacons atop the World Trade Center and the Citibank building and, far to the south, the unextinguished flame of the Statue of Liberty. From the aeries of the city itself, New York's cliff-dwellers saw the city go black except for the slow rivers of white and red auto lights in the streets-and the pallid orange glow of ten thousand candles flickering in apartment windows.

New York's Eight Million affect a kind of Battle of Britain good cheer in the teeth of the city's frequent catastrophes-a mood reinforced this time by the repeated assurances of radio newscasters that everybody was coping. There were frightened screams in the streets when the light first died; a woman near lower Manhattan's Hudson riverfront clung to her son and wailed, "Don't leave me alone! Don't leave me alone!" But much of the city responded to the dark with a nearly desperate bonhomie. Strangers exchanged words and kindnesses. Cars honked hello at one another. Saloons poured booze on the house, some by intent, some in despair at customers walking away from their tabs. Spontaneous parties formed on sidewalks. Jugs of wine passed across backyard fences. Heads popped out windows and, in good-natured plagiary from the movie "Network," bellowed: "I'm mad, and I'm not going to take it any more!"

But spirits frayed as New York's longest night since '65 wore on into the dawn and coping got progressively harder. Sim-

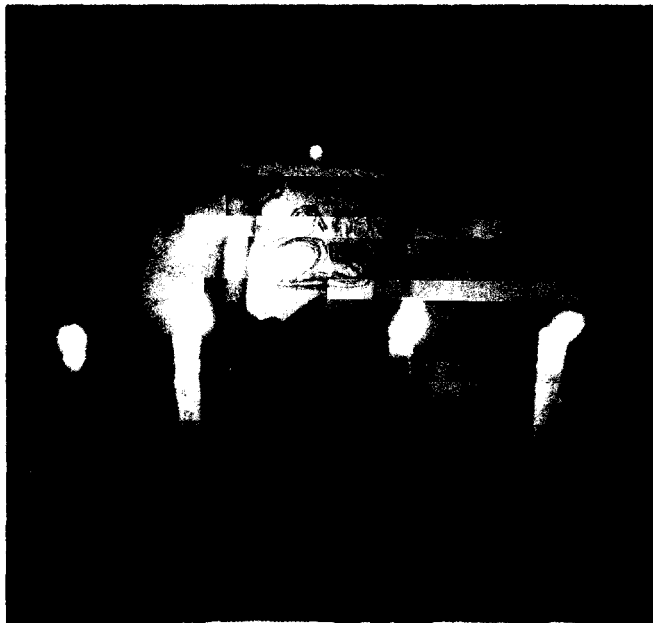


Steve Castagneto

Provender: Candles for the dark and booze for the blues

At the Empire State Building, the lights-out nightscape

Dan Ballotti



Waring Abbott—Sigma

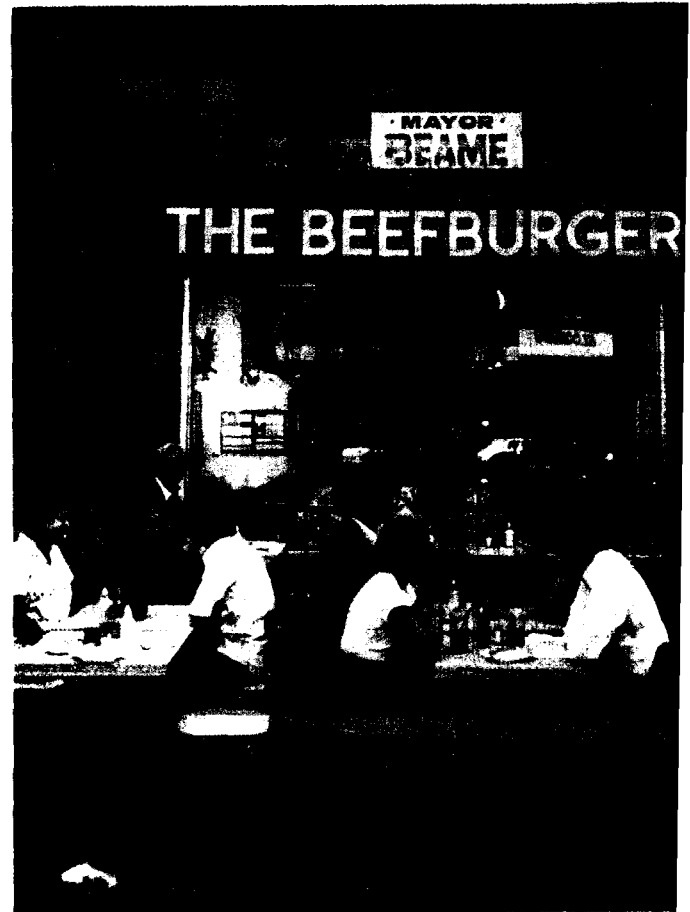
ply moving about became a hardship. Pedestrians bumped through the dark, looking for Samaritans with flashlights or pocketlighters. Most of the nearly 200 subway trains then on the tracks managed to crawl to the nearest stations, thanks to a warning from a quick-witted dispatcher; still, seven trains carrying 1,000 passengers were stuck between stations for hours and the entire system folded thereafter for the duration. Commuter lines to Westchester and Long Island went dead, marooning thousands of homebound suburbanites. Perhaps a thousand of them spent the night at Penn Station, curled into chairs or sprawled on the floor. Outside, cabbies hawked and sold rides to suburbia at marked-up rates.

Buses and cabs kept moving as long as their gasoline held out; with gas pumps dead, there was no way to refuel them. The mass demise of 10,000 stop signals brought auto traffic near chaos—a nightmare avoided only by a measure of self-restraint and the imposed discipline of an army of cops, meter maids and civilian volunteers. One youth guided cars through a clogged Manhattan intersection with flags, another with a flare, yet another with strings of firecrackers noisily signaling “stop” or “go.” A 10-year-old girl took over a crossing of her own, with such aplomb that even police cars stopped at her direction.

Manhattan's high-rise residential and business towers lost their glamour for groundlings. Water pumps died, reducing upper-story tenants to fetching pailsful from fire hydrants—or even boiling water from toilets. The World Trade Center took an hour and a half getting one elevator working, and an hour

In midtown, burgers al fresco and placards for Beame

Gilles Peres—Magnum



THE BLACKOUT

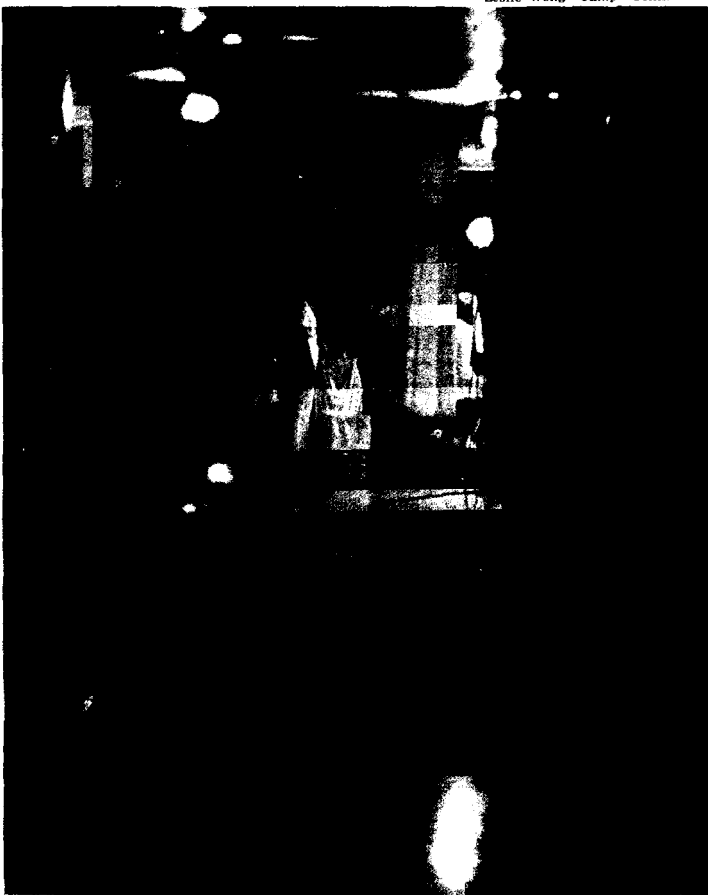
and a half more evacuating the last diners from Windows on the World. The Fire Department had to cut through the back of an elevator in the New York Hilton to rescue eight passengers. Getting home at night and to work next day became an Alpinist's adventure—a wheezy climb lit by flashlight and candle through Stygian stairwells. In the leveling democracy of the blackout, the city's biggest banker, Walter Wriston of Citibank, had to walk down 23 flights and up fifteen to get from his flat to his office—and the Metropolitan Opera's principal cellist, Jascha Silberstein, labored up sixteen stories, lighting his way with a cigarette lighter and lugging his \$65,000 cello.

A STILLNESS ON WALL STREET

The business of New York is business—but on the morning after, business closed down, partly on the plea of Mayor Beame, partly because nothing worked anyway. Some retail lines flourished, in survival gear ranging from ice cubes to battery lamps, and blackout black-marketeering sprang up in the streets—soda for \$3 a can, candles for \$5 and \$10 apiece, cab rides for four and five times the metered fare. But the corporate giants didn't even try. Wall Street's spires stood empty against the sky. Stores shuttered up and lost an estimated \$20 million in sales in a single day—most of it beyond recovery. Banks quit banking. One old man stood pounding on the sidewalk check-cashing machine at his Chemical Bank branch in Greenwich Village and screaming, "I want my money! Give me my money!"—till police led him brusquely away.

Hospitals this time were geared for troubleso they thought—under a post-'65 law requiring them to install backup power sources in case of trouble. But not all of them stood up under the sudden overload. At Metropolitan Hospi-

At Bellevue, a borrowed generator pierces the gloom



Leslie Wong—Camp—Contact



David Harris—Newworld

On a stalled subway under Grand Central Terminal, passengers fight for sleep

tal, the alternate generator failed, and staffers had to haul heavy mechanically operated respirators up eleven flights to intensive care. At giant Bellevue, an emergency backup system folded, sinking the hospital and its 850 patients in blackness. Doctors and nurses kept critically ill cases breathing with hand-pumped air bags. A young intern poked through the gloom with only his ophthalmoscope—the instrument used for eye examinations—to light a path. An operation was finished successfully by candlelight, a 7½-pound baby girl delivered by flashlight.

Tourists, who come to New York rather expecting the worst, got it—at blacked-out restaurants, darkened theaters and suddenly paralytic hotels. The electronic room locks jammed at the Algonquin, shutting guests out all night. The Plaza's computer broke down, jamming reservations; new arrivals were issued candles and sleeping space in the lobby. The Waldorf-Astoria, switched off in '65, had since installed "blackout closets" on every fourth or fifth floor and stockpiled them with flashlights, lanterns and candles with improvisational holders. They helped, but not everybody. One man headed for the twelfth floor picked through the lobby, inquiring for the stairway. "Mister," said a bellhop, "I've been here twelve years, and I don't know where the stairs are." Less hardy souls camped where they were, stretched on the marble floors or jammed two to a chair. An elderly couple sat silent in the confusion, afraid to venture out through the dark to their own hotel—directly across the street.

THE GREAT WHITE WAY GOES BLACK

The tradition that the show must go on rarely had a finer hour. Not everybody could observe it: the cast of the X-rated revue "Oh! Calcutta!" was caught naked when the lights went out and, unable to navigate to the dressing room, had to borrow clothes from the audience to get home. But the Lincoln Center production of "The Cherry Orchard" and Liv Ullman's star turn as "Anna Christie" played on by commandeered candlelight and finished to standing ovations. At the Metropolitan Opera, the switch-offrouted the National Ballet of Canada from the stage early in the second act of "La Fille Mal Gardée"; in the ensuing silence, the harpist began plinking out "Dancing in the Dark." At Shea Stadium, lights-out caught the hometown Mets trailing the Chicago Cubs 2 to 1 in the sixth inning. The PA system somehow survived; the organist struck up "Jingle Bells" and "White Christmas," and 22,000 fans made for the exits singing Yuletide carols in July.

In the commonwealth of darkness, New Yorkers rediscovered their kinship with one another, and celebrated it. In a downtown high-rise, a blind woman descended to the lobby with a candle and offered it around. "I have no use for this," she said. "Someone might need it." On an uptown street corner, lawyer Beaufort Clarke lit his way to a pay phone by

THE BLACKOUT

candle, and someone offered him \$20 for it. **My God, people need these**, he thought—so he repaired to his apartment, collected all the candles he didn't need, and handed them out in the streets to disbelieving passersby. At a midtown hotel, a young woman found herself abandoned by her date, robbed of her wallet, and stranded miles from her Long Island home. A vacationing deputy sheriff from New Orleans put her in a cab and paid the driver \$50 to deliver her there. "We're from Louisiana, honey," he drawled. "We're used to trouble."

It was, the Eight Million told one another, like London in the blitz—a time when pain begets kindness and necessity mothers invention. At Coney Island, the Wonder Wheel ground to a stop, with one carload of passengers hanging 150 feet high; a thrown-together work gang of policemen and volunteers wound them down by hand. A Baskin-Robbins franchise ice-cream merchant drove his Lincoln Continental up on the sidewalk and did business as usual by the light of his headlamps beaming through his show window. On West End Avenue, the lobby of a handsome old high-rise went dark. The building superintendent jumped **his** car over the curb, nosed up to the front entrance, rigged a hookup between his auto battery and the wiring inside—and within ten minutes had the lobby bathed in light.

BAGPIPES AND BOOZE

There was fear in the streets as well—tenant patrols moving through the city's uneasy DMZ's with clubs and pipes, merchants bathing their storefronts in the glow of headlamps or standing armed guard inside. But the dominant impulse outside the stricken ghettos was to laugh in the face of the dark. Convertibles coursed the streets, their passengers riding atop the back seats and waving at passersby. A bagpiper piped in the cavernous reaches of Grand Central Terminal. A midtown hamburger parlor, sweltering inside, set its tables on the sidewalk **and stayed** open; Elaine, restaurateur to the literary crowd, poured champagne gratis outside her place—for those, at any rate, who belonged. Booze ran free, or reasonable; one well-liquefied soul wandered out of a Waldorf bar, glass precariously in hand, and announced to the candlelit lobby: "Better days are still to come."

They were, but aching slowly—too slowly to suit Mayor Beame. The failure blacked him out in the midst of a reelection campaign speech in a synagogue in Co-op City, a teeming middle-income project in the Bronx. He headed home to Gracie Mansion in the dark, the two-way radio in his limousine gone dead, and convened a first crisis meeting of his commissioners—until the heat of the night and a roomful of candles routed them. City hall, as it turned out, wasn't working either, except for a brief interlude powered by a portable Fire Department generator. When it was hauled off

to the morgue to keep the refrigeration system working, Beame settled in at police headquarters, behind the desk once used by Commissioner Teddy Roosevelt, and began contemplating the bad news: acres of looting, a thousand fires and perhaps as many false alarms, a slack police response to a total-mobilization order, a megalopolis in the dark—and Con Ed's hourly receding timetable for lighting it up again.

ABE IN NIGHTTOWN

His cold war with Con Ed's Luce heated up through the night, patently fired on one side by Beame's second-term aspirations—"You couldn't buy this attention," glowed an aide—and on the other by Con Ed's fear of damage suits for negligence. Beame stopped short of that magic word at first, bristling instead that New Yorkers "cannot tolerate . . . a powersystemthatcan shut down the nation's largest city with a bolt of lightning in Rockland County." But as the Eight Million fell under a state of emergency and Con Ed's recovery dragged, the mayor of Nighttown sat steaming in a tangle of emergency phone lines, sputtering shards of sentences: "Goddamit, why can't-get moving!" In the morning, hollow-eyed after an hour's nap and a cup of tea, he went public with the trigger charge of gross negligence—the only ground for damage litigation against Con Ed—and with his own tight-lipped "total outrage" at what had happened.

Con Ed's retort to the mayor was a plea of not guilty and a plodding return to normal—an effort that required its own total mobilization of 23,000 employees and an inchmeal struggle to get the juice running. It was a slow war, waged mostly underground along Con Ed's intricate cable network, undoing what flashes of lightning had done. It took more than four hours to restore service to the first 150,000 of Con Ed's 2.8 million city customers and 25 hours to bring in the last

44,600—among them Beame's Gracie Mansion.

Cheers echoed down the brick-and-asphalt canyons as civilization switched back on. Lights lit. Air conditioners rumbled to life. Water splashed from taps. Subways ran. Traffic flowed. Elevators climbed skyward. Computers whirred. Stock tickers clattered. Stores and offices reopened. The fires in the ghettos and barrios burned low, leaving the lawful majority who live there to pick up the pieces of their neighborhoods and their lives. The Eight Million congratulated themselves one more time. But there was a contingent note in their cheering this time, born of the blackness of the night, the furies it loosed on New York—and the resigned feeling among the powerless that a city twice eclipsed in twelve years could go dark any time again.

—PETER GOLDMAN with TONY FULLER, SUSAN AGREST, DEBORAH W. BEERS and BARBARA BURKE



Dan Ballotti from the Goodyear Blimp

At the end of an eclipse, mid-Manhattan lights up the sky



Storming a barricaded clothing store: Some needed a dolly to get it all home

Olivier Rebbot—Sygma

THE PLUNDERERS

At 9:30 the lights went out," recalled a weary, disheveled cop at the 81st Precinct house in Brooklyn. "At 9:40 they were breaking into stores. A woman called in and told me, 'They're coming across Bushwick Avenue like buffalo.'"

And so they continued coming for 25 hours—not only in the grimy streets of black Brooklyn but in the ravaged South Bronx and the twin ghettos of Harlem and Latino East Harlem in northern Manhattan. Teen-agers, grown men, old women and young children all together, they yanked and crowbarred the metal guards off storefronts, smashed windows, shot out locks and declared open season on all the merchandise within reach.

Fifty new automobiles in the showroom of a Bronx Pontiac dealer were hot-wired and driven off into the night to be disemboweled for parts by the next evening. A sporting-goods store along Brooklyn's even tackier version of Broadway was cleaned of 70 rifles and thousands of rounds of ammunition. Appliances, shoes, groceries, furniture, booze, records—anything salable, anything usable was carted off by the unstoppable swarm, often to be resold within an hour at a fifth of its value. "It's a holiday out there," said a Brooklyn cop. "It's open house on New York City."

At the end, there was a pile of grubby statistics as high as the rubble in the streets. An estimated 2,000 places of business were sacked and looted, and the first guesses on property losses ran up to \$1 billion. Uncounted hundreds of merchants, operating in areas deemed too risky to be worthy of insurance, were put out of business permanently.

The human cost was no less terrible. Hundreds of persons were hospitalized or treated in emergency rooms, 44 firemen were hurt fighting the nonstop roar of a thousand fires, 418

policemen were bashed and lacerated by the storm of bottles, bricks and other missiles hurled from the streets and the slum tops. For their part, the cops made 3,776 arrests carting in prisoners in such swelling numbers that normal booking procedures had finally to be dispensed with and an old condemned prison, Manhattan's notorious Tombs, reopened to handle the crowds.

And yet, for all the human misery embraced by these statistics, most New Yorkers, on either side of the law-abiding fence, seemed to feel that they had got off lucky. For one thing, the 25 hours of pillage and terror produced only two deaths—neither of them a police officer. In some subtle unspoken understanding that reached from the precinct houses to the streets and back again, the two sides warred with clubs, bricks, baseball bats, broom handles and bottles—but rarely with guns. What fire there was, from snipers and police, seemed mostly for effect.

This comparative restraint came about partly from a calculation on both sides that no one could gain from escalation, partly from a lack of passion. Heedless though the mobs were of any concern for private property, their pillage was opportunistic and apparently not the product of the sort of blind rage against whitey's Establishment that had fueled the racial riots of the late '60s. In many areas, there was as much laughter as anger in the streets, and cops and looters alike spoke of the "festive" atmosphere.

From Police Commissioner Michael Codd on down, the police reacted as if the power failure itself had changed the rules of the game—and maybe it had. Codd was at his home in Queens eating dinner when the blackout hit, and after the commissioner groped his way to his telephone to call headquarters he found it was dead to outgoing calls. Head-



Olivier Rebbot—Sygma

quarters reached him a moment or two later, and he ordered the department's civil-emergency plans to be put into effect—essentially a matter of asking every able-bodied cop to report to his precinct.

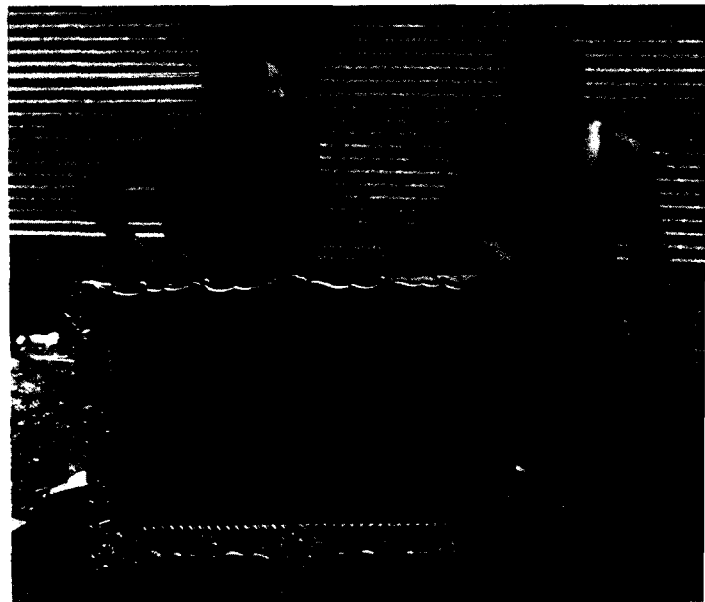
It was a scary moment. Even en masse, the city's 25,000-man force could not hope to contain an all-out insurrection, and Codd knew that he would not get a full turnout. The police and city hall have been squabbling for years, and the Patrolmen's Benevolent Association was threatening action against Mayor Abe Beame's recent proposal to put just one cop in each patrol car in more than half the city's precincts. By 4 a.m., only 8,000 policemen had reported for duty; another 10,000 stayed home, either willfully or because they could not be reached.

SHORT-LIVED PROMISES

Codd drove to city hall to meet with the mayor and other city officials—a meeting that was quickly transferred to police headquarters, where emergency power and communications were available. At first, Codd and the others clung to the hope that the blackout would be short-lived—as Con Edison had promised—and that the citizenry would behave with the same remarkable calm it had shown in the 1965 blackout. Neither hope lasted long. By 2 a.m., 880 arrests had been reported (already nine times more than in 1965), Con Ed was hedging its timetable and the mayor was forced to acknowledge “sporadic” looting in several areas of Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx and Manhattan.

The number of prisoners—“unprecedented in the city's history”—itself became a problem. Available jails were crammed to the point of overflow, and Beame's reopening of the Tombs (closed by court order in 1974) alleviated matters only for a couple of hours. Identification and booking procedures collapsed under the torrent of new arrivals, partly because the power blackout had ruptured communications with the central criminal and fingerprint files in Albany. Many felony suspects were jammed into cells without being formally charged; most misdemeanor suspects were let go. Beame sat hunched through a long night at Teddy Roosevelt's huge old desk in the commissioner's office, sometimes taking a phone message, sometimes staring out the window into the inky night. He began to speak bitterly of Con Ed's failure, and the word he used was “outrage.”

Out in the precincts, the city's cops were improvising what tactics they could against the resurgent wave of looters. “The first calls I got were simple,” said officer Marvin Goldston, who was in charge of the eighteen-man active roster at



Gilles Peres—Magnum

Wild in the streets: Firemen fight blaze under Brooklyn El while looters rip off paintings, clothing and each other. In quieter moments, a welder secures storefront, a wounded youth lies at curbside, firemen catch a few moments of rest.

Tom Keller—Liaison



Brooklyn's 81st Precinct. "They- simply said, 'It's hell out here.' When we took ten persons in, twenty took their places. If they had decided to move on us, there was nothing to do but come back and hold this building. And they could have taken the precinct if they wanted it."

Even with reinforcements and the arrival of daylight, the cops could mount little more than games of harassment against the pillagers. Armed with table legs, baseball bats and lengths of tubing, as well as their nightsticks, the cops would pounce in groups of two to six on a store that was in the progress of being emptied. Flailing away with both hands, they might succeed in collaring one or two looters and force the others to drop their booty and run, but at the same moment another crowd of 50 or 100 celebrants would be ripping the guard fence off another store down the block and crashing through the plate-glass window. "Once it starts, it's like a plague," said a fireman. "And all the police can do is chase them."

'I JUST CAN'T USE A THING'

Inside the stores, the atmosphere was not a whole lot different from that of a bargain basement just before Christmas. On the second floor of a discount furniture store at Linden Street and Broadway, in Brooklyn, two men looked over the merchandise. "Let's get this couch, man," said one. "Couch is too heavy, I want that dresser," said the other.

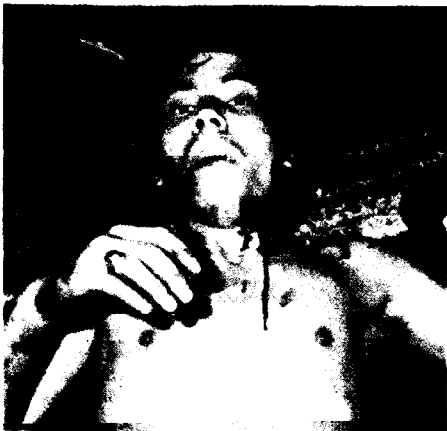
They lugged out the couch anyway. A woman wandered by asking if anyone had seen any end tables. There were none, and she gave up in disgust. "I just can't use a thing up here," she said. Two other women were struggling to move a large dresser when a young boy passed by. "Just let me get my stuff out of here and I'll be back to help you," he said.

Around the corner, four cops were trying to figure out how to transport three men they had just arrested. "You're just going to have to sit on somebody's lap, pal," an officer said to one of the suspects. As more patrol cars arrived, the cops herded their prisoners into their cruiser. One of two women watching nearby challenged the police: "Why are you taking him in? He didn't do nothing but come when they called him." She and one of the cops quickly worked themselves into a shouting match, in which the cop called her "an illiterate moron," but as the police drove-off with her man she was smiling dreamily. "Well, they took him," she said to her friend, "but they didn't take me." And with a sigh she heaved a mirror onto two mattresses and a bureau teetering on a makeshift dolly, and slowly the two women struggled down the street toward home.

Even as Thursday stretched into a long hot day, the bruising game of catch-as-catch-can went on unabated. A company of officers in an unmarked van swooped down on some looters sifting through a wrecked stationery store. A young woman took a crack across the rear with a nightstick; a young man dropped his loot and straightened up, only to be clothes-lined by a billy and dumped on the sidewalk. Another woman ran into the scene and



Photos by Gilles Peress—Magnum



was shoved away by a sweating cop, who screamed at her, "Get your face outa my face, woman!" "All I wanted to know was if he'd seen my kids," the woman explained plaintively, "and he shoved me. They just crazy." A few feet away at the curb, another woman seined the rushing water in the gutter like a gold prospector, looking among shards of glass for gems that might have been dropped by the gang that hit a nearby jewelry store.

Ten miles across the city, in Harlem and the South Bronx, the same scenes had been played-but with a curious difference. In Brooklyn, especially in a 1½-mile long commercial stretch of Broadway dividing Bushwick and Bedford-Stuyvesant, destruction and looting of stores had been unselective and nearly total-including pet stores and stationery shops. Elsewhere, the freebooters showed more discrimination, choosing their targets with a discernible sense of utility and some community spirit. Jewelry, liquor and appliance stores were knocked over immediately-their goods sometimes resold in an ad hoc bazaar on the nearest corner-and shoe stores were almost as popular, especially if they sold Pro-Keds basketball sneakers. "It was a good night for the looters and anyone who had the cash to buy," said an East Harlem resident named Hazel Plant. One group of looters backed up a truck to a caved-in furniture store and moved out the whole inventory. A \$500 color-television console went for \$135, a pair of Pro-Keds for \$5. One group of young entrepreneurs set up shop in a previously abandoned store on 120th Street and openly hawked their goods to all comers.

GOODWILL AND BALL BATS

Some stores, however, were spared. One chain supermarket, disliked in the area for its alleged high prices, was picked clean, but another, more popular supermarket nearby went untouched. A particularly large crowd invaded a chic haberdashery, reputed to have an uppity sales staff, and made off with everything but a solitary espadrille. But a Kress five-and-ten on 106th Street did not suffer so much as a single chipped window. "A lot of the stores in this neighborhood are locally owned," said Wittor Lopez, a teacher in a junior high school. "They weren't hit as much. Besides, these people knew what they wanted."

Some few businesses managed to save themselves by posting guards. Nat Marcus, the owner of a sewing-machine and fabric store called Sav-A-Thon, kept five young men with baseball bats in front of his doors, replaced later by a large truck blocking access to the windows. When the looting around him continued well into Thursday afternoon, Marcus called in nine relatives and employees, loaded his inventory into the truck and drove it home. He plans to restock and reopen the store-if no one bums down his building first.

Apartment dwellers as well as store owners were forced out by

the rampage. At 1237 Broadway, in the heart of the Bushwick holocaust, all three families living in the building piled their belongings into station wagons and went to stay with relatives in fear that the building would be put to the torch. "There are too many animals here-we're getting out," said José Reyes. They had no idea where they would resettle, except that it would not be in Bushwick. "We'll never come back here," said Mrs. Reyes, "not even to visit."

As Thursday night loomed and power had still not been restored to much of the city, many police and plain citizens feared there might be an escalation of the looting into a full citywide riot. Cautiously, the mayor and police commissioner asked Gov. Hugh Carey to send in 250 state troopers-"to help control traffic," as they explained. There was no need. After 25 hours of virtually uncontrolled pillage, the looters were spent at last-and not a whole lot remained to be smashed and stolen anyway.

In the stunned and silent aftermath, many New Yorkers in and out of the battle zone began speculating about the causes of this massive outburst of lawlessness-though few held to the old, '60s-style faith that sociological insight might lead to social harmony in the city. Ghetto life is still brutal. The oppressive and inescapable summer heat drives people from their sweltering tenement apartments out into the

edgy boredom of stoops and sidewalks. Then, too, there was the abrasive pressure of poverty in areas where unemployment runs to Depression levels. "They were just waiting for something like this so they could go berserk," said a 19-year-old Bushwick resident named Lydia Rivers. "It's a chance to let our frustrations out-a valve," chimed in a man standing nearby.

CARNIVALS AND COSTS

A citywide blackout was more temptation than the ghetto seemed able to withstand-not least because many of its residents felt that they had been just plain foolish not to have taken better advantage of the last one. "We made a mistake in '65," said a young black in Harlem. "But we're going to clean up in '77. We want to go in like rats so that tomorrow they won't be able to go to the stores-there won't be any. They'll have to build this same hole all over again."

Other looters simply saw nothing wrong with the spree. "We're doing right," insisted a teen-ager. "I got a whole bedroom and living-room set. I got a wardrobe. And what I don't need or what I can't wear, I'll give to people who do need it. There's no real big thing about it." Added a police lieutenant: "I'm not surprised at what happened. Here was an opportunity of something for nothing. There was no concept of a moral issue involved. The spirit was carnival."

Peace, when it came, also brought with it a different kind of reflection. "This place will be a ghost town now," lamented

Trashing a mannequin: 'It's open season on New York'

Alex Webb—Magnum

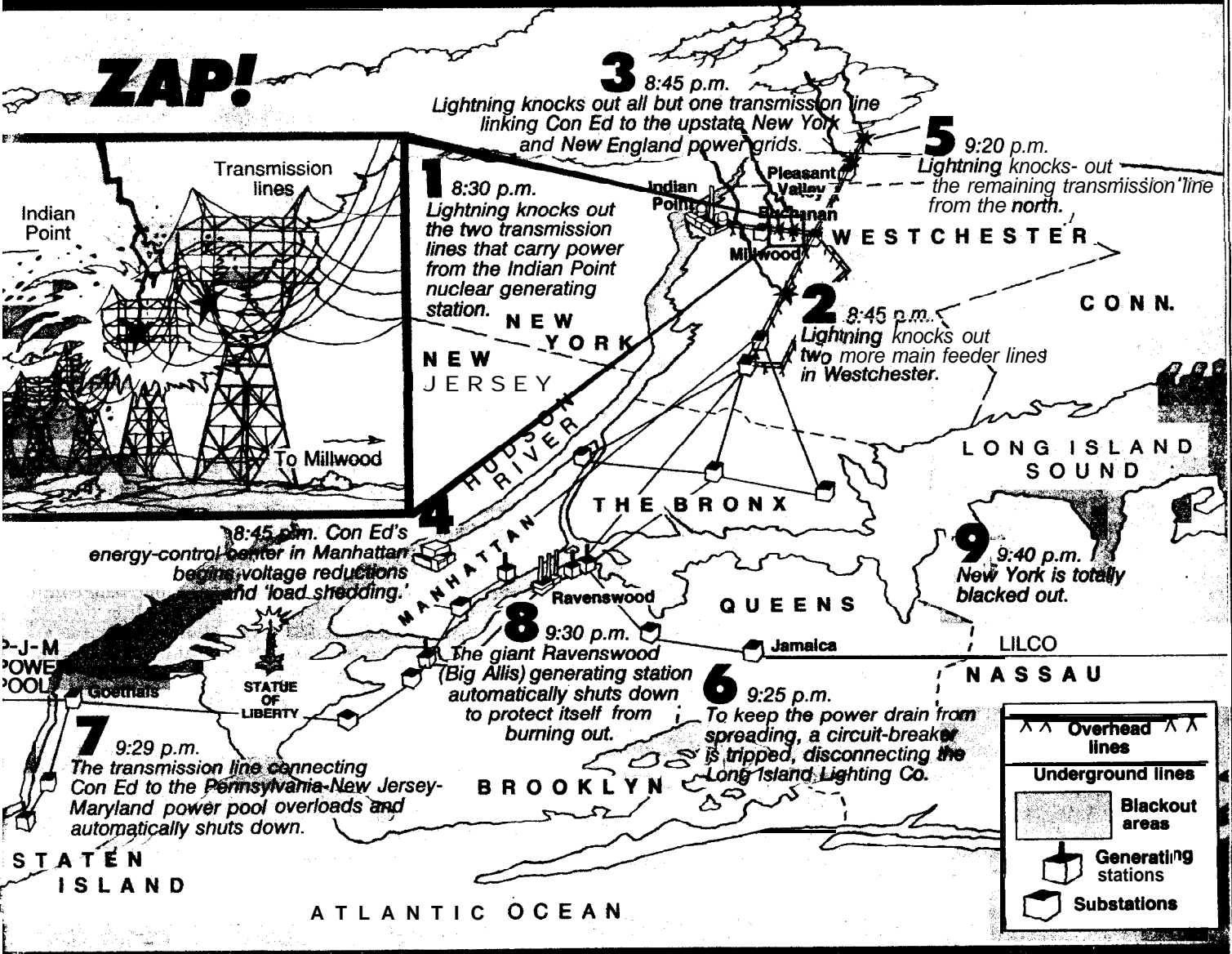


Dorothy Webster, a **Bushwick** mother of two. "I can't even get a loaf of bread for my kids." "I thought we were through with this," said another angry Broadwayite. "But we got mothers and fathers looting out here. Now what do they expect for their kids, for their future? They're destroying their own neighborhood and they think it's a game."

The blight is not necessarily total. Some merchants, even in Bushwick, are planning to start again under their own power,

and others are looking for Federal disaster aid to give them the chance. What most chills hope for the future is not so much the damage already wrought as the reflexive reaction of ghetto dwellers to raise unbridled hell when the lights went out-as, in a time of mounting energy shortages and technical complexities, they almost certainly will again.

—RICHARD BOETH with ERIC GELMAN, FREDERICK V. BOYD, PAMELA ABRAMSON and DENNIS A. WILLIAMS

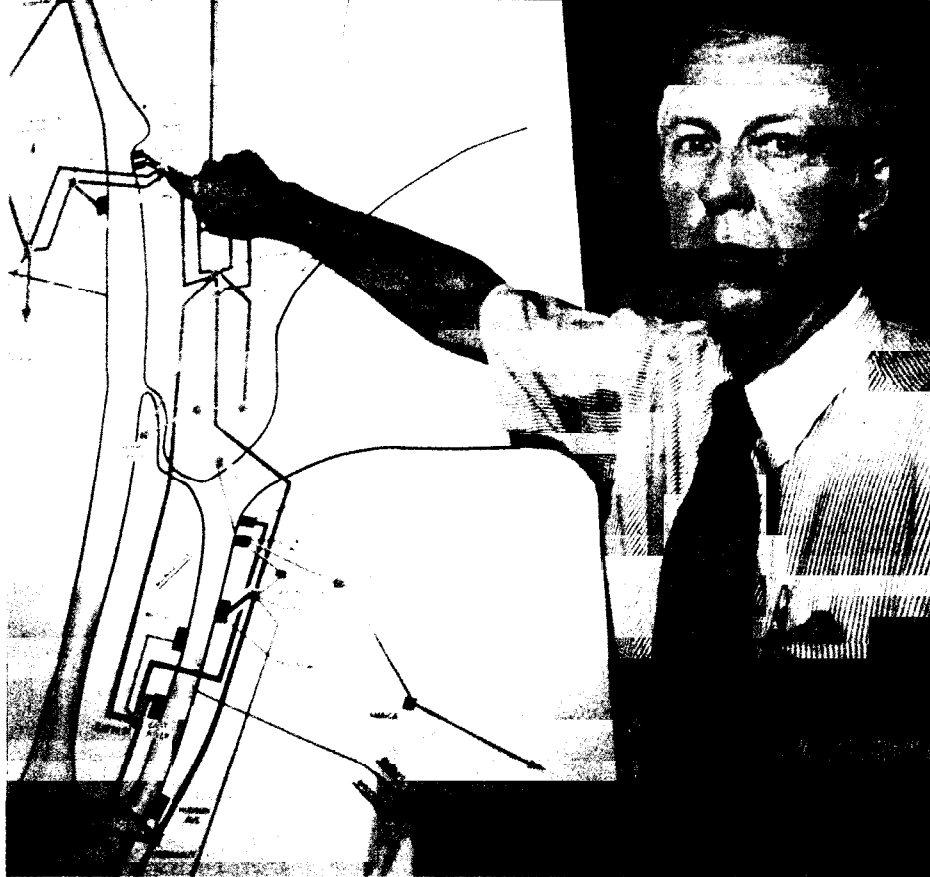


1b Ohlsson—Newsweek

WHY IT HAPPENED

Was the blackout Consolidated Edison's fault? To chairman Charles Luce, an "act of God" was to blame—a quadruple whammy of lightning that cut off half of Con Ed's power supply in less than an hour. But to Mayor Abraham Beame, the debacle was the result of "gross negligence" by the utility New Yorkers love to hate. It was the second total blackout New Yorkers have endured in a dozen years, and the only satisfaction for anyone was that the nationwide grid of interconnected power systems had been improved enough since the first to contain the damage. "To the extent that the problem was localized," noted chairman Richard L. Dunham of the Federal Power Commis-

sion, "the system did work." But Con Ed itself has remained remarkably vulnerable. Nowhere are so many people dependent on so few generators as in New York. Not only is the population unusually dense, but economic and environmental pressures have forced Con Ed to close many of its old city power stations and limited its ability to build new ones. As a result, it typically has to buy as much as half of the electricity it provides its customers from other utilities such as the New York State and New England power pools. To make matters worse, virtually all of Con Ed's neighboring power systems are heavy users themselves—which limits the amount of extra electricity Con Ed can buy in a pinch. Hemmed in by all these constraints, Con Ed simply couldn't cope when the lightning struck last week. The exact



Chuck Pullin

Con Ed's Luce: An 'act of God'—or 'gross negligence'?

scenario of the massive blackout is still somewhat muddled. At first, Con Ed reported that it had been zapped by three separate bolts of lightning; later, the company said there had actually been four bolts. Some skeptics maintained that there was no lightning at all, only an equipment failure. Other critics charged that instead of quickly "shedding load" after the lightning struck—reducing demand by cutting off service to some areas—the company deliberately procrastinated out of fear that service cuts would subject it to lawsuits and would anger already unhappy customers. By Con Ed's own account—the most detailed so far—the cascade of events was too fast to handle.

The trouble began on an unusually hot and humid New York July evening. Most of the 9 million or so people who depend on Con Ed for electricity were home, preparing dinner, watching television and running their air conditioners. In all, they were drawing about 3,800 megawatts of power, about half of which Con Ed was getting from the New York State and New England grids, the Long Island Lighting Co. (LILCO) and the Pennsylvania-Sew Jersey-Maryland power pool (P-J-11). North of the city, thunderstorms were raging—and at about 8:30, lightning struck two high-voltage transmission lines that carry 900 megawatts of power to the city from the Indian Point nuclear generating station about 33 miles up the Hudson. The lines have built-in lightning arresters, but this bolt was unusually powerful, and it triggered the circuit breakers designed to isolate overloaded lines and prevent damage to the system. With no way to transmit its power, Indian Point shut down. Immediately, the rest of the system began attempting to take up the slack. Con Ed's ten other generators increased their output, and the utility began drawing more electricity from its neighbors to the north, east and west.

LIGHTNING STRIKES AGAIN

About fifteen minutes later, lightning struck again, this time twice and in rapid succession. In less than a minute, two main feeder lines supplying much of Westchester County were knocked out, along with four of the five lines bringing in 2,000 megawatts of power from the New York State and Sew England power pools. Automatically, the system began shed-

ding load, cutting voltage—first by 5 per cent, then by another 3 per cent—and blacking out selected suburban communities in an effort to keep power supply and demand in balance. An FPC source later charged that Con Ed failed to act quickly enough. "They got themselves into a situation where an emergency was one step down the road," the source told **NEWSWEEK**, "and they didn't react."

Con Ed said it did what it could. Like most Northeastern utilities, its system is equipped to shed 50 per cent of its load automatically. Unluckily, however, the lightning had disrupted the equipment, limiting its load-shedding capability to only 35 per cent. That meant some load had to be shed manually—and that took precious time. While the computers could do it in seconds, it took as long as 30 minutes for the operating engineer on duty at Con Ed's energy-control center in Manhattan to contact the appropriate substation and then flip the proper switches in the proper sequence to cut off power to a few communities.

Then, as Con Ed tells it, at about 9:20, lightning struck the system for a fourth time, knocking out the remaining line that was supplying Con Ed with electricity from the New York State and New England grids. In less than an hour, the Con Ed system had lost half its power supply. Frantically, the operating engineer

tried to shed more load; at the same time, the system began drawing more heavily on the two outside power sources still connected, LILCO and P-J-M. It was a race between how fast the overloaded system sucked power in and how quickly the control center could cut it out. The control center lost. "If you don't have enough shedding then the whole system goes down—and that's what happened to us," Con Ed president Arthur Hauspurg later said. "The operating engineer just didn't have enough time."

'OFF TO THE RACES'

At 9:25, the Hicksville-Jamaica line bringing in power from LILCO began to overload, and rather than risk a blackout of its own, the Long Island utility disconnected itself from the Con Ed system. For four minutes after that, the Linden-Goethals line, carrying electricity from the P-J-M pool, was Con Ed's only outside source of power; then, at 9:29, it overloaded and automatically shut down. "If that hadn't happened," noted a New Jersey utility spokesman, "Con Ed would have sucked a lot of power out of our system and we would have been off to the races."

That left Con Ed's entire load sitting for the most part on the shoulders of "Big Allis," Con Ed's 1,000-megawatt generator at Ravenswood, Queens. Big Allis's turbines slowed under the load, much as a circular saw would when a heavy board is pushed into it. As RPM's dropped, the frequency of the system's alternating current plummeted from its normal 60 cycles per second—and within seconds, the huge generator's frequency-sensitive relays tripped open to keep Allis from burning itself out. Like a chain reaction, Con Ed's nine remaining generators quickly cut out. By 9:40, New York and Westchester were totally blacked out.

Within minutes after the system failed, the Manhattan control center was swarming with engineers and company officials. Luce, who had just finished dinner at his Bronxville home when the lights went out, showed up at 10:10 p.m. to take personal charge of the desperate effort to restore power. The first priority was to get the high-voltage transmission lines energized again—a job far more complicated than simply closing a few circuit breakers. The high-voltage lines, many of which are buried underground, are encased in a

acket of pressurized oil that both cools and insulates them. "When you lose the power, you lose the pressure," Hauspurg explained, "and it takes twenty minutes or more to restore the pressure."

At the same time, Con Ed's entire system had to be checked for damage—both by computer as well as by physical inspection. With eleven generating stations, 21 substations and thousands of circuits at 50 locations stretching from Staten Island to Poughkeepsie, Con Ed engineers faced a tedious and lengthy task. As it turned out, except for a transformer at the Buchanan, N.Y., substation that burned out in a premature attempt to restore power to Westchester, the vast system was found to be completely intact.

THE SLUMS WERE LAST

Once it had been checked, the system could be turned back on—but slowly, to prevent lethal power surges that could knock it out for weeks, and then only in a certain order. High-load areas and those served by overhead power lines came first, which meant that the slums of Harlem and the South Bronx were among the last areas to have service restored. It wasn't until 10:39 Thursday night, nearly 25 hours after the lights went out, that New York and Westchester were completely plugged in again. The very last neighborhood to get its power back was Manhattan's Yorkville, which includes Gracie Mansion, the mayor's official residence. (The next day, by apparent happenstance, a transformer at a Con Ed plant in Yonkers conked out, creating a small local blackout for two hours.)

The big question was whether Con Ed could have prevented the loss of its transmission lines—and whether it had done all it could to stave off the blackout once the system started switching itself off. As a result of the Great Blackout of 1965, when a generator failure in Canada triggered a chain reaction that ultimately plunged most of Ontario and the Northeast of the United States into darkness, Con Ed had incorporated a variety of safeguards into its system. Operations had been highly computerized. The utility was tied in with the regional

control centers that had been established to monitor the status of all major transmission lines and power stations. Its system had been equipped with sophisticated sensors that could detect generator failures and potential overloads, and then automatically curtail service. And it had the capability to sever its links with neighboring power systems to keep trouble from spreading.

But most of these safeguards were designed to contain a power failure—not prevent one—and that's all they did. "There's no utility that can have an absolutely foolproof system that won't ever shut down," said Luce, and the record would seem to bear him out. Blackouts are hardly uncommon elsewhere around the country. A faulty relay left the entire state of Utah without electricity for about an hour a year ago, while a similar malfunction blacked out 1.3 million people in south Florida for up to four hours last May 16. And just four days before New York's lights went out, a fire and explosion in a utility manhole cut off power to much of downtown St. Louis for eight hours.

LOOKING FOR ANSWERS

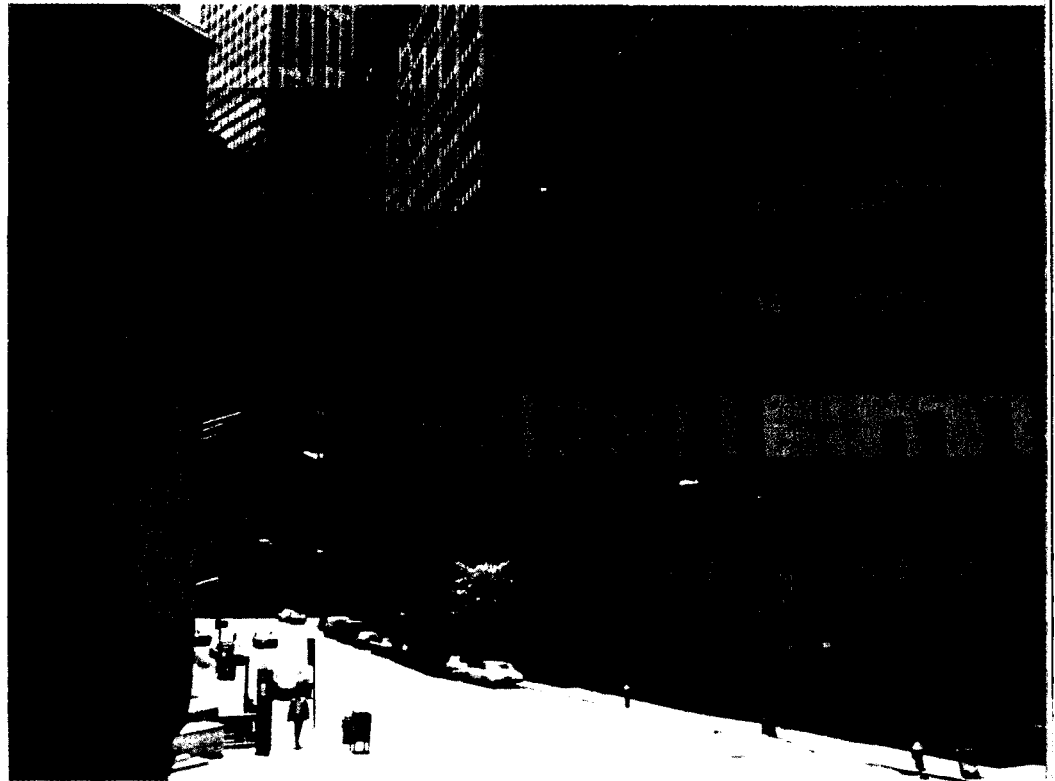
By the end of last week, no fewer than four separate groups—the FPC, the New York State Public Service Commission, a blue-ribbon city panel appointed by Mayor Beanie, and Con Ed itself—had announced investigations into the causes of this latest blackout. If the findings showed that the company was indeed at fault, it could lead to lawsuits costing Con Ed millions of dollars in damages. Worse, it could lead to pressure for a state take-over of the long-troubled and widely unpopular utility. And while no one was predicting what the probes would ultimately show, Con Ed itself seemed to indicate that there was room for improvement in its operations. Over the weekend, it announced that it would beef up its control-center staff, initiate a storm-watch system and explore the possibility of increasing its load-shedding capability.

—ALLAN J. MAYER with PAMELA LYNN ABRAHAM and WILLIAM MARBACH in New York, and WILLIAM J. COOK in Washington

THE IMPACT

Al Everett, 47, sat on a crate in front of his ravaged radio- and television-repair shop in the Bushwick section of Brooklyn the day after looters had smashed in and made off with his entire inventory. Everett has no insurance, \$8,000 in debts and a wife and four children to feed. If he could get a loan, he'd like to open up shop again in the same neighborhood; he knows the people and likes the work. But Everett has tried unsuccessfully before for loans and he knows the answer he would get this time. Instead, he clung to the forlorn hope that a customer might come by and drop off a television set for repair. "It only takes one person," he said earnestly, "and you're in business again."

There were thousands of Al Everetts counting their losses in New York City last week, but few of them were



Alex Webb—Magnum

Wall Street at noon: A day of absence, but little pinch for big business.

THE BLACKOUT

talking bravely about starting all over again. The lucky ones lost only their goods; the unlucky ones were burned out as well. In the ten or so blocks near Everett's store, 75 businesses were wholly destroyed. Deputy Mayor Osborn Elliott's office set up a hot line for businessmen who needed help. Twenty-four hours after the pillage ended, Elliott estimated that some 2,000 had suffered damage totaling in excess of \$45 million. In parts of Brooklyn, East Harlem and the South Bronx, there simply was no nearby store left in which to buy food, clothing or other necessities; they had been stripped, torched and abandoned—many of them forever. "This neighborhood is finished," said Seymour Hass, owner of H&H Meats in burned-out Bushwick. "There's no way it'll attract any new money."

LOST SALES, SPOILED MEAT AND DEADBEATS

But the smoldering storefronts were only the most visible evidence of New York's economic loss in what some were calling the "Billion-Dollar Blackout." Not a mannequin was overturned on fashionable Fifth Avenue, yet retail merchants there and elsewhere in the city lost a good share of the \$55 million or so they take in on a typical summer shopping day. Wall Street was closed, wiping out \$5 million to \$15 million in brokerage fees. Within hours after the power went off, hun-

prospects. They asked angrily why the National Guard had not been called in. (Mayor Abe Beame said there had not been enough time.) Because of soaring crime and arson rates, many had not been able to get insurance at any price, nor would anyone want to buy their businesses—leaving them no choice but to hold their ground as best they could. Some drove their cars up on the sidewalk and shone the headlights on the storefront to discourage looters. Ernie Blye guarded his Brooklyn tailor shop with a gun and a snarling Gennan shepherd and warned a marauding crowd: "I got ten cans of potash upstairs. I'm goin' upstairs now. I blind you, you come unstairs after me. I blind you." But the looters early on found other targets, among them seventeen A&P markets and countless "mom and pop" stores. When it ended, many businessmen were in no mood to reopen—and many roaming the streets realized that they, too, were victims.

In the powerless but peaceful areas of the city, the Dannon Yogurt plant was knocked out for twelve hours and lost 25 per cent of its production. Banks could do no business without their absentee employees and the electricity that powers their computers. Radio and television stations lost millions on unspoken and unsung commercials, and corporate giants like RCA, Exxon and Celanese were closed. But there were a few winners as well: ice distributors did a brisk

business, as did stores selling flashlights and candles. Sex-book stores in Times Square reported a heavier than normal run of browsers; many of them apparently suburban businessmen who came to town only to find their office buildings closed. And one young independent entrepreneur in Greenwich Village's Washington Square Park was attracting scores of customers with this sales pitch: "Hey, if you think you're blacked out now, wait till you try the stuff I got." He was peddling marijuana joints for \$1.

REMAIN AND REBUILD-OR RUN?

At the weekend, Mayor Beame announced that the Small Business Administration had declared the city a disaster area, making the ravaged merchants eligible for long-term low-interest loans. That may persuade some of them to rebuild. But it did not end the debate over how much the city might suffer from this latest blow to its reputation.

Citibank chairman Walter Wriston said he viewed the blackout as a "one-shot loss to the city" in terms of lost sales taxes, adding: "We'll all be playing catch-up ball for the next few days, but we will recover." Raymond D. Horton, a professor at Columbia University and staff director of the recently disbanded Temporary Commission on City Fi-

nances, agreed. "We should be careful not to overreact," he cautioned. "It ain't good, but it ain't the end of the world." And even Gerald Sanderson, executive vice president of the Chicago convention and tourism bureau, had kind words for a competing city. "I'm sure there are a lot of people in New York now that are a little unhappy about being there," he said, "but I don't think there will be a switch of conventions out of New York any more than a snowstorm here would affect us."

But Peter Lauer, president of Lauer and Holbrook, a Chicago firm specializing in recruiting and placing executives in the \$25,000-to-\$100,000 bracket, noted: "We already were handling too many résumés from people who said they'd go anywhere in the country except New York. This blackout and looting will only strengthen that feeling." The eventual price may not be all that high, but even so it will be one that battered New York can ill afford to pay.

-TOM NICHOLSON with MICHAEL REESE, CHRIS J. HARPER and JOHN CONCANNON



Peter B. Kaplan

Harlem market the morning after: The lucky merchants were only looted

dreds of restaurants had to pitch out spoiled meat and other food, guests had skipped out of darkened midtown hotels without paying their bills and the city's theaters—both movie and legitimate—counted losses in the millions.

Some of the lost sales will be recouped later, but the city's reputation as a place to do business took another pasting and, real or imagined, this latest example of the hazards of the Bin Apple could persuade other businesses to stay away or drive out those already there. Publicly at least, city officials and some business leaders pictured the blackout and looting as only a temporary blow, but others said it was far more serious. "It is a tremendous setback for New York," said Leonard Yaseen, retired chairman of the Fantus Co., a Dun & Bradstreet subsidiary that helps firms relocate. "And it happened just as the city was taking so many positive steps to encourage business."

In the stricken neighborhoods, dazed merchants were more concerned with short-term survival than long-term

A Walk on the Wild Side



The girl walked slowly out of the Port Authority Bus Terminal on Eighth Avenue and squinted through rimless glasses at blacked-out Times Square. She was wearing cut-off jeans and a T shirt. Her name was Ginnie, she said, and she had ridden down from Connecticut to visit some friends in Manhattan. She was 20 years old and white, and a bus had just delivered her into a caldron of the night life that might have scared her even with the lights on.

"I guess I'll never get a cab," she said. "I hope it's safe to walk."

Having just arrived in the same area with a busload of horseplayers from The Meadowlands trotting track in New Jersey, I was hoping the same thing. Then suddenly there was a black pimp at our side, along with two tall hookers, and they were shouting for us to walk with them. "We'll make it safe," said one of the girls. There was a gap between her teeth as she smiled, and the laugh came from deep in her throat. "Nothing else to do. All the customers be scared to go up into hotel rooms with no lights."

Soon the pimp in his golden threads was leading a small procession up Eighth Avenue. A transistor radio was blaring from somewhere, and two hours into the blackout that was producing destruction and flames in other parts of the city, our unlikely mix of hustlers and passersby was walking jauntily away from fear and danger. "Oh, there's been some trouble," the other hooker said with a Spanish accent. "I seen six kids jump one guy before, and it made me sick. But most of the night people, we don't want that. We want to go about our business. Because this is America."

'IT'S MY LIFE'

"The night life ain't no good life," Willie Nelson once wrote, "but it's my life." It is also shared by a large segment of New York. There are a lot of people who, like it or not, do much of their living in the dark. So while the blackout laid bare the worst instincts in thousands of ghetto dwellers, it was far less unsettling to midtown night people. Some, like my newfound friends in Times Square, adapted with a strange camaraderie. Others used the darkness as an excuse to intensify the general partying level of their lives. And a few scarcely noticed that the lights were out.

"This place was jammed," said a

bartender in a First Avenue café called St. John. "But the only voice I could hear was from this woman who kept demanding more banana Daiquiris. Amazing. Everybody else is worrying about candles and getting some fresh air, and she's yelling about why we don't have a blender that works on batteries."

"I know what time the lights went off," said one executive when it was all over. "But I'd be hard pressed to tell you when they came back on. The blackout was like a signal to hurry. We all thought of crazy things that we'd normally do over a month's time-and tried to cram them all into one night."

In front of one popular Second Avenue place, a handful of middle-class celebrants were busy fitting some marijuana and amyl nitrite into their crowded blackout evening. A stranger, equally well dressed, approached them and asked for a puff of one of the joints. For a few moments they bantered back and forth. Finally the newcomer said, "All right, you guys. If you won't share your grass, I'm not going to share my cocaine." Within seconds another night-life alliance had been formed.

Romantic liaisons seemed just as prevalent-and they followed a distinctive pattern. New York's last big blackout produced a dramatic increase in the birth rate nine months later-or so it was said. I'm betting that last week's incident will have

Times Square celebrants: The night life
Warning Abbott—Sigma



the same impact on divorce. The 1965 blackout occurred in the fall, and many families endured it in the comfort of their homes. But this time it was summer, when spouses and children tend to be at vacation homes and even part-time night people may be tempted into improbable flings. The darkness helped make temptations come true.

Only a few blocks from the sex-for-sale district of Times Square, I watched it being bartered on a supposedly more sophisticated level in a Rockefeller Center restaurant. Office workers were discovering one another in a rush of cocktails and emotion, and conversations were heavy with such philosophical games as "This blackout must be fate, clear." The dismaying thought of entire rooms filled with such bons mots kept me from pressing onward to the singles bars, but a check the next day revealed that they had done near-record business.

TIME FOR BRUNCH

In P.J. Clarke's, the night-life capital on Third Avenue, people viewed blacked-out love with somewhat more detachment. "We closed two bars last night and climbed seventeen floors to your apartment," one Chicago visitor was saying to a new female friend. "Then we smoked some grass and it seemed like it was already time to climb back down to go to brunch. At this point I'll do anything in the world for you, darling. Except stay awake."

"I'm so disoriented by it all," said a woman in the travel business. "I can hardly tell the difference between truth and reality."

I've been smiling about that line for a while. But I've also been thinking about the genuine disorientation of Times Square with a pimp escort and Clarke's under its blinking emergency lights. The broken glass and shouts of rage in Brooklyn and the South Bronx could have been a thousand miles away last week, because the night life was getting along fine in the dark. "The last blackout felt like New Year's Eve," one woman told me. "I'm afraid this is more like the morning after." That's a price that the night people, at least, have always been willing to pay.

Shock of Recognition



Few things are as stimulating as other people's calamities observed from a safe distance. So people relish Edward Gibbon's "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire" and New York City's perils, technological as well as financial.

Much of the nation thinks, not without reason, that the city is sunk in darkness, even at high noon, and that the blackout was a sign of disapproval from above, a foretaste of fire and brimstone and pillars of salt. And let the records show that even the engineers resorted to theology, not physics, when they issued their first explanation in the dark. Consolidated Edison said the trouble, which started with a stroke of lightning, was "an act of God." The theology of the age is that God does not exist and that He manifests Himself in random unpleasantness. "Let us hope," prayed a thoroughly modern cleric (in a Peter de Vries novel involving a flood in suburbia), "that a kind Providence will put a speedy end to the acts of God under which we have been laboring."

Consolidated Edison provides even the humblest of its customers with harnessed power beyond the dreams of Louis XIV. But its customers, like Oscar Wilde, who when shown Niagara Falls said it would be more impressive if it flowed the other way, are hard to please. Consolidated Edison's customers reserve for it that special irritability Americans feel toward utilities and other institutions (such as government) that provide necessary services and then expect Americans to pay for them.

TRANSFORMING POWER

Like an oil embargo, a blackout (a brief but *convincing* energy crisis) demonstrates the fragility of the arrangements, social and technological, on which cities depend. And in this blackout, the nation *again* saw frenzy clothed as purposeful action. In the 1960s, when some people discovered they could ransack merchants without much risk, they did so. And voices were raised to rationalize the ransacking as a manifesto against the legacy of slavery, etc. Last week the lights went out, and instantly looters came out again, again happily pillaging and burning out small merchants, shattering productive lives. And again the familiar voices were heard, rationalizing barbarism, explaining that the smiling looters were really protesting New York's "inadequate welfare," etc. Thanks to the blackout, sophistries, as well as babies, are gestating.

The fact that extinguishing street lights is enough to crack the thin crust of civilization in whole neighborhoods is just especially vivid evidence that today nothing, not even petroleum, is more essential than electricity, or has done more to transform the world. Before electricity was harnessed a century ago, conditions of life were more like those of Julius Caesar's day than of Jimmy Carter's day.

This transformation began, in a sense, just over the horizon from where, last Wednesday, electricity suddenly seeped away. Ninety-nine years ago in Menlo Park, N.J., an inventor formed the Edison Electric Light Co. At Menlo Park, Thomas Edison produced "a minor invention every ten days and a big thing every six months or so." But it took a very different nineteenth-century man to express the sense of wonder inspired by all the "big things." He did it in the greatest American autobiography, "The Education of Henry Adams."

'FORCES TOTALLY NEW'

Born in 1838, great-grandson of the second President, grandson of the sixth, Henry Adams watched with mingled awe and dismay the swift transformation of an agrarian republic into an industrial society, and "found himself lying in the gallery of machines at the Great Exposition of 1900, his historical neck broken by the sudden irruption of forces totally new."

"The year 1900 was not the first to upset schoolmasters," Adams wrote. "Copernicus and Galileo had broken many professorial necks about 1600; Columbus had stood the world on its head towards 1500; but the nearest approach to the revolution of 1900 was that of 310, when Constantine set up the Cross."

"... To Adams the dynamo became a symbol of infinity . . . he began to feel the 40-foot dynamos as a moral force, much as the early Christians felt the Cross. The planet itself seemed less impressive, in its old-fashioned, deliberate, annual or daily revolution, than this huge wheel, revolving within arm's-length at some vertiginous speed . . . before the end, one began to pray to it; inherited instinct taught the natural expression of man before silent and infinite force."

No doubt all this, said about "mere" electricity, seems quaint and overwrought in an age that has discovered the neutron and what it can do. What most distinguishes modern people is that they have so slight a sense of awe about the

world around them. But before condescending to Henry Adams, modern people should consider that, in a sense, they take more things on faith than did a thirteenth-century peasant tilling the fields in the shadow of Chartres.

When the peasant wanted light he built a fire from wood he gathered. Modern people flip switches, trusting that someone, somewhere, has done something that will let there be light. How many switch-flippers can say what really happens, in the flux of electrons, when a generator generates?

The most advanced form of travel for the peasant was a sailing ship or a wagon: the mechanisms were visible and understandable. This year 41 million passengers will pass through Chicago's O'Hare airport, obedient to disembodied voices, electronically amplified, telling them to get into cylindrical membranes of aluminum that will be hurled by strange engines through the upper atmosphere. The passengers will not understand, and will be content not to understand, how any of it really works. And we think the fourteenth century was an age of faith.

THE STRANGEST AGE

Perhaps ours is the strangest age. It is an age without a sense of the strangeness of things. Of course some people are different. Einstein, for example, had a highly developed sense of the sheer magic of the universe. But New Yorkers are more typical modern people. Their strongest reaction to the blackout was indignation: Why was *mere nature* allowed to disrupt technology?

The human race has grown up and lost its capacity for wonder. This is not because people understand their everyday world better than people did in earlier ages. Today people understand less and less of the social and scientific systems on which they depend more and more. Alas, growing up usually means growing immune to astonishment. As G.K. Chesterton wrote, very young children do not need fairy tales because "mere life is interesting enough. A child of 7 is excited by being told that Tommy opened the door and saw a dragon. But a child of 3 is excited by being told that Tommy opened the door." The 3-year-old is the realist. No one really knows how Tommy does it.