



Blackout

James Goodman

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On July 13, 1977, there was a blackout in New York City. With the dark came excitement, adventure, and fright in subway tunnels, office towers, busy intersections, high-rise stairwells, hotel lobbies, elevators, and hospitals. There was revelry in bars and restaurants, music and dancing in the streets. On block after block, men and women proved themselves heroes by helping neighbors and strangers make it through the night.

Unfortunately, there was also widespread looting, vandalism, and arson. Even before police restored order, people began to ask and argue about why. Why did people do what they did when the lights went out? The argument raged for weeks but it was just like the night: lots of heat, little light--a shouting match between those who held fast to one explanation and those who held fast to another.

James Goodman cuts between accidents, encounters, conversations, exchanges, and arguments to re-create that night and its aftermath in a dizzying accumulation of detail. Rejecting simple dichotomies and one-dimensional explanations for why people act as they do in moments of conflict and crisis, Goodman illuminates attitudes, ideas, and experiences that have been lost in facile generalizations and analyses. Journalistic re-creation at its most exciting, *Blackout* provides a whirlwind tour of 1970s New York and a challenge to conventional thinking.

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