

## The Blackout Via TV; By Phone; On Blogs. Also: Only Days Left To Save .NYC

by {ga=lforlano}

Monday, August 18, 2003 12:00 AM

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When the blackout occurred, I had plenty of water, a working landline, two cell phones that never lost power, 24-hour Internet access, a fully-operating electric stove, and cable TV. That is because I was in Tokyo.

The only New Yorkers I could bond with, though, were the CNN anchors on my TV as they beamed me images of Avenue A and gave accounts of the bonfire in Tompkins Square Park just steps from my apartment.

It was somehow instructive to be on another continent, another culture -- a place where, on June 22, there had been a "voluntary blackout." It was called [Candle Night](#), and its purpose was to get people thinking about energy conservation, among other things. (It is sponsored by an environmental organization called the [Sloth Club](#)

) As part of this event, major tourist sites such as Tokyo Tower and Himeji Castle were left in the dark, on purpose.

Over the summer in Tokyo, amid earthquakes and typhoons, there were also fears of power failure, especially, according to the Japan Times, because of safety inspections that required the closure of 17 nuclear power generators.

But, following the blackout in New York on August 14th, Japanese utility companies were quick to reassure Tokyoites that a major power failure would never happen in Japan. This, the newspaper Asahi Shimbun told their readers, is due to differences in Japanese power grids and rerouting capabilities. Not everybody in Japan is so confident, though, especially one of the major train companies, which operates at full capacity every day.

### Calling New York, But Not Getting an Answer

Despite all of my technology, it was impossible to contact anyone in New York. Landlines rang and rang with no answer due to overloaded telecom networks, despite Verizon's extensive back-up systems which insure that hospitals, essential services and 911 are operating during emergencies. Payphones continued to work for those patient enough to stand in line ( [scroll](#)

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[down to the fourth photo](#)

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Most of us prefer the convenience of cordless phones ("Can I call you back? I'm in the shower right now.") forgetting that they won't work without electricity. Some have even abandoned landlines all together preferring to pay only one bill, for their cell phone. But, for the most part, cell phones from the top six carriers were [unreliable](#) through Friday morning. Verizon Wireless reported getting four times their usual traffic. Cell phone towers require electricity and have only three to six hours of back-up batteries.

This is the second time that cell phone networks have faltered in the face of an emergency. The first was during 9/11 when the Internet became the most reliable communication network. Unlike 9/11 however, the Internet was of no use in the blackout because most people couldn't connect to it without a computer. However, BlackBerry e-mail pagers did work because they rely on an older type of network technology.

If there was any time to be [low-tech](#) , it was during the Blackout of 2003. New Yorkers quickly learned the value of having at least one battery-operated radio, flashlight, plug-in phone.

### Blackout Blogs

Many New York blogs covered the blackout with photos. Some of these include [Gothamist](#) , [C amWorld](#)

, [Capn Design](#)

, [Satan's Laundromat](#)

, and those by

[John Wehr](#)

, [Andrew Raff](#)

, [Jesse Chan-Norris](#)

, [Adam Fields](#)

, and

[Robert Spsychala's SnapLog](#)

[The Fray](#)

, and many other blogs, are collecting stories Blackout 2003 from their readers.

To follow up on the bonding theme, online community [Craigslist New York](#) received almost thirty postings about "missed connections" during the blackout - personal ads resulting from the many close encounters in the dark. But are you sure you want to meet someone you only saw in the dim beam of your flashlight???

### **Another Plea for .NYC**

The city has only until August 25 to file comments that could result in ownership of the Internet domain name .NYC. If secured, this new name could replace .COM, .GOV or .ORG in New York City-related organizations and businesses. For a brief background on this issue as of March 2002 see "[The Battle for .NYC](#)."

Proponents of this plan argue that the city could gain marketing power, increase revenue and improve the quality of life in New York if the .NYC name were secured. Queens Community Board 3 has been backing this issue since April 2001 when it passed an Internet Empowerment Resolution requesting that the city obtain .NYC. However, those opposed disagree with the concept that a city government should be able profit from the licensing of Internet domain names such as hotels.nyc or restaurants.nyc.

In order to make .NYC a reality, lawmakers need to file [comments](#) with the [Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers](#)

. Further attention and support from Mayor Bloomberg, Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications Chief Gino Menchini, City Council Technology in Government Committee Chair Gale Brewer and Commission on Public Information and Communication Chair Betsy Gotbaum and others is needed.

Laura Forlano is a doctoral student studying communication technology policy at Columbia University.

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