



Hurricanes and Homelessness

Mikayla Moss

For past the couple of weeks the mood has completely changed for the lower end of the United States. Instead of bracing for the heat, here in Florida, we've been bracing for the wind, the rain, the flooding, and the occasional tornado. Yes, this past September was definitely the King of Hurricane months and it was nowhere near pretty. While I was barricaded in my school's cafeteria with three hundred other fortunate students I pondered what precautions were taken for the homeless community at that time.

Chaos began in Houston, Texas as Harvey ripped through the state bringing one of America's greatest cities to its knees. The New York Post reported 911 calls and Tweets being sent all throughout the night begging for rescue and help. These request were coming from people who lived in homes.

Before the Hurricane touched, officers and officials of Houston were gathering the homeless community and advising them to take shelter. Seeing that they lived on the street it would be assumed that this would be a no brainer, but homeless people feel the same way normal citizens feel about their houses. The streets are their home and they aren't going to leave their place of comfort without a fight. The Post tells of one man who lived under the highway. His hurricane supply gear was a heavy blanket and extra food. They also spoke to another who said he refused to go into the shelter because they wouldn't allow him to drink or smoke. On top of that he

wasn't sure that he would be able to find his way back to his area. He lived in a spot that is what he considered the perfect location and he didn't want to give it up in fear of losing it. Make no mistake about it the reporter did document that this man was terrified; it was his first hurricane. But what these catastrophes go to show is that homeless people are more afraid of leaving the place they call home than a deadly storm.

In Miami it was a completely different story. It could be assumed that once officials in the South of Florida watched the devastating impact Harvey had on Houston, they were not willing to take any chances when Irma came through. First officials advised, and then they forced. Ron Book, chairman of the Miami-Dade Homeless Trust, was not waiting for the bodies to come rolling in instead he implemented the Bakers-Act that gave him the power to detain individuals who refused to go into a shelter. The Bakers-Act basically states that the individual or individuals are not mentally well and need to be detain. This was the chairman's mindset, anyone who wanted to brace the storm outside of a shelter was mentally unstable. This was a strange course of action, many people took it as Miami not being prepared so they had no choice but to apply this act. The act implies that the homeless are insane if they don't seek help which people believe sends out the wrong message. At the end of the day the majority went willingly and only six people had to adhere to the law. This action brought to light that maybe another law needs to be created specifically for these type of disasters. A law where officials can remove anyone if they are in danger.

The goal when hurricanes come around is to keep everyone safe. Yes, it might not be the most comfortable and or constitutional, but everything revolves around keeping people out of harm. Everyone could agree on that no one should be taking shelter on the street, it's dangerous for the actual person and the ones who were sent to help.

References

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