

Texas Power Outages: An Ethical Lapse in Leadership

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The state of Texas is known for many things, but most people would agree that harsh winters or heavy snowfalls would not fall into its traditional reputation. However, In February of 2021, a winter storm rolled through the United States and had startling impacts on communities lacking infrastructure to deal with it. Texas was hit hard by this winter storm, but it wasn't the entire state that was suffering. Low-income communities were among the first to lose power, and the last to have it restored. This isn't coincidental and follows a historical trend that shows the disproportionate systemic disadvantages that come with living in a low-income community.

Families struggled to keep warm during the outages and had no to minimal access to electricity, food, or water. The situation was dire, and a state of emergency was declared— but the impacts were even more insidious than they seemed. Housing in low-income communities is often built with less insulation, making the people living in them more vulnerable to the cold, and low-income families in general have less resources and abilities to flee from danger when emergencies arise. Additionally, after outages were finally restored, electric companies skyrocketed prices that would put low-income families in an even more perilous situation by charging outrageously inflated bills for the inelastic good that is electricity. Texas is home to the energy capital of the world; the struggles that affected the low-income communities in Texas were not to blame for a lack of resources, but rather a lack of infrastructure that could be protecting some of the state's most vulnerable residents.

The Johnson textbook talks about the foundations of ethical leadership and the lapses in leadership that may occur resulting in unethical practices. Regarding the leadership surrounding the winter storm in Texas, the shadow of privilege is extraordinarily apparent. The shadow of privilege is the notion that leaders and those in positions of power are subject to better opportunities, and generally face greater privileges than that of who they lead (Johnson, 2018).

This privilege is apparent by resources being funneled into wealthy area codes in order to regain lost power to those communities as quickly as possible. These neighborhoods were grossly prioritized which left low-income communities to fight for their lives (Dobbins & Tabuchi, 2021). An even more blatant display of the shadow of privilege is Senator Ted Cruz's decision to take a family vacation to Cancun to escape from the cold. Cruz attempted to deflect his decision by arguing that anyone who was able to would have wanted to leave the cold to relax somewhere warm with their families (Livingston, 2021). This may be true, but the fact of the matter is that almost everyone struggling with the winter storm did not have access to such privileges as flying away to Cancun on a whim. People were freezing to death and low-income communities were ignored while people in leadership prioritized both themselves and wealthy areas.

While the shadow of privilege definitely reflects issues of inequality in how aid and relief was distributed during the storm, the shadow of irresponsibility sheds light on where many of those inequalities derived from. The shadow of irresponsibility is the notion that leaders aren't held accountable for all things that go wrong or the actions of their followers, but the fact remains that leaders' irresponsibility on issues can be the root cause of disasters (Johnson, 2018). Low-income areas tend to be closer to industrial sectors than wealthy neighborhoods, and when power outages occur, large industrial complexes can release bursts of pollutants into the air both upon shutting down and restarting (Dobbins & Tabuchi, 2021). On a technical level, leaders aren't responsible for a winter storm rolling in that causes state-wide power outages— but when low-income communities are disproportionately affected by issues with having power restored and toxic pollutants being released into the air, it must be considered how those areas came to be underprivileged in the first place. Political leaders failing to fortify infrastructure and to put legislation in place that will protect and help further develop low income communities likely

rests as the root problem to these issues. Leaders face the shadow of irresponsibility by blaming something out of their control, like the weather, when they should be working to uplift low-income communities so that they can have a safe speedy recovery from emergencies, much like how wealthier areas are privileged to.

The emergency may have come to a close, but the winter storm that affected Texas certainly brought to light and emphasized the gross systemic inequalities present in the state as well as unethical practices in leadership that have fostered and protected this inequality. If I were in a position of leadership during this situation, I would have focused resources into the most vulnerable communities to try and protect them during the emergency. In an ideal world, I would have already been working toward improving community infrastructure so as to protect my followers from natural disasters such as this, and general improve their livelihood by increases their quality of living and not providing exclusive privileges to those who are already better off and in more developed or otherwise wealthy areas.

Works Cited

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