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Climate change is war – and Wall Street is winning

We shouldn't reward polluters with profit

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by **Nathan Schneider** ([/profiles/s/nathan-schneider.html](#)) - [@nathanairplane](#) (<http://www.twitter.com/nathanairplane>)

Among the most iconic images to emerge from Hurricane Sandy's assault on the Eastern Seaboard in 2012 were those of the Goldman Sachs building lit up like a torch by its own generator while a blackout left the rest of lower Manhattan in the dark. This proved a sign of things to come: Within days, the financial district was back to work, but Mayor Michael Bloomberg seemed far slower to notice what had befallen other areas of the city. He sought to go through with the annual New York Marathon just a week after the storm, until residents and runners rallied to inform him that coastal neighborhoods of his city had been devastated.

The images stuck in my mind from that period are of the devastation: Whole blocks burned down by electrical fire, overturned cars in the streets, sick people trapped in pitch-black buildings without medication, ruined furniture stacked in the front yards of uninhabitable homes, neighbors uniting around makeshift supply depots in church halls.

I no longer saw the warming oceans that exacerbate storms such as Sandy as abstractions or a matter of merely the environment or nature. Climate change is a crisis of justice among human beings. We all depend on this planet, but some are more insulated from its undoing than others. Some will be bailed out, but most won't. Some will find a way to profit as the waters rise, but many more will drown. The challenge of stemming climate change is not just a matter of raising consciousness and spreading awareness; it is a struggle for democracy and survival.

This weekend New York will host the largest climate-related march in history (<http://peoplesclimatemarch.org/>), with 100,000 people expected to take the streets on Sunday to call for meaningful action to come from the United Nations Climate Summit on Tuesday. The march boasts more than a thousand sponsoring organizations and has been aggressively publicized with subway advertisements and a documentary film (<http://watchdisruption.com/>). It could be a decisive moment to rally support for policies that will keep our planet habitable. But we need more than a festive march. That's why the next day in the financial district, not far from where Goldman Sachs lit

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I will be among the crowds of people on Monday morning dressed in blue (to mirror the rising tides) and interrupting the workday by bringing the crisis to its cause (<http://floodwallstreet.net/#pledge>). The action was inspired by a call from communities at the front lines of the climate crisis to take nonviolent direct action against the corporations driving the extractive economy. To that end, we're planning a mass sit-in at the symbolic center of the global economic order.

“ We need neither spectacle-seeking hipsters nor bankers in search of safe investments but for all human beings to band together to defend our right to subsist.”

For years now, entrenched corporate interests have ensured that U.N. meetings on climate change accomplish next to nothing. The names of host cities have become a litany of false starts: Rio de Janeiro, Kyoto, Copenhagen, Cancún, Durban, Doha. This month's meeting in New York is a prelude to a more ambitious session next year in Paris. Corporate lobbyists will be close at hand — through the mechanisms of the U.N. itself (<http://www.polarisinstitute.org/files/CorporationsClimateandtheUN.pdf>) and by buying the inaction of leaders (http://www.ucsusa.org/assets/documents/scientific_integrity/a-climate-of-corporate-control-report.pdf). Combating climate change means transforming an economic system based on short-term corporate profits and a political system that is all too eager to furnish them. And it all starts by taking on Wall Street.

Corporate America wants to claim that it's coming around, that at long last it is going green. Lockheed Martin, whose hardware helps make the U.S. military one of the world's top polluters (<http://www.newsweek.com/2014/07/25/us-department-defence-one-worlds-biggest-polluters-259456.html>), is a sponsor (<http://www.climateweeknyc.org/partners-sponsors/>) of Climate Week events surrounding the United Nations summit. So is Bloomberg, the former mayor's company. Michael Bloomberg recently garnered headlines for co-organizing a report, “Risky Business (<http://riskybusiness.org/>),” on climate change as a threat to corporate bottom lines.

“It is our hope,” the report states, “that it becomes standard practice for the American business and investment community to factor climate change into its decision-making process.” One subway ad on behalf of the climate march asks, rhetorically, “What puts hipsters and bankers into the same boat?”

What we need now, though, are neither spectacle-seeking hipsters nor bankers in search of safe investments but for all human beings to band together to defend our right to subsist. We shouldn't have to wait for the investor class to agree; the purpose of business is to meet our economic needs not to dictate them. That's basic democracy. The climate struggle is a chance for the commoners of this planet to show what it means to be good stewards of creation. If the Goldman Sachs of the world try to stand aloof, we need to take their crisis to them.

The night that Hurricane Sandy struck New York City, Kalin Callaghan huddled with her husband and two young sons in their fifth-floor apartment. They live in the Rockaways, a narrow strip of land along the Atlantic Ocean at the far end of Queens. “We watched the entire peninsula submerge,” she remembers. In the months that followed, her neighbors mobilize to empty out ruined homes, get supplies where they were needed and clear hazardous mold. Politicians were slow to help, while real estate developers descended on the ravaged areas (<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/nov/06/hurricane-sandy-americas-disaster-capitalists>). She heard scientists explain the connections between Sandy and climate change; the unprecedented storm the Rockaways suffered was a sign of things to come.

Callaghan teaches at a local arts organization, and in recent weeks, with memories of the storm in mind, she has turned her art toward the climate. She has been helping create enormous banners and props that will adorn Sunday's climate march, where she'll be part of a oceanfront contingent of Sandy-affected New Yorkers. On Monday she'll be wearing blue at Flood Wall Street.

“We learned that it wasn't going to be the government coming to our rescue,” Callaghan said this week outside a planning meeting for Monday's action. “It needs to be the people leading the charge.”

Nathan Schneider is the author of “Thank You, Anarchy: Notes From the Occupy Apocalypse (<http://www.throwboat.com/books/thank-you-anarchy/>)” and “God in Proof: The Story of a Search From the Ancients to the Internet (<http://www.throwboat.com/books/god-in-proof/>).” He has written about religion and resistance for Harper's, The Nation, The New York Times, The Chronicle of Higher Education and elsewhere and is an editor of two online publications, Killing the Buddha (<http://killingthebuddha.com/>) and Waging Nonviolence (<http://www.wagingnonviolence.org/>).

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