

## Superstorm exposes New York's economic divide

Claire Schaeffer-Duffy | Nov. 2, 2012 NCR Today

Hurricane Sandy made visible the "hideous" economic divide in New York City, [writes Reuters columnist David Rohde](#) [1] in a piece published in *The Atlantic*. A former *New York Times* correspondent and two-time Pulitzer Prize winner, Rohde spent 15 years covering wars in the Middle East, Bosnia and Afghanistan and was twice taken hostage. He and his wife live in lower Manhattan and were in the Big Apple when the storm struck.

In some respects, Sandy was a great equalizer, causing power outages in rich and poor neighborhoods alike. The difference of money became apparent in the aftermath, Rohde writes.

"Those with a car could flee. Those with wealth could move into a hotel. Those with steady jobs could decline to come into work. But the city's cooks, doormen, maintenance men, taxi drivers and maids left their loved ones at home," and, out of necessity, kept working, he writes.

Citing new census data from *The New York Times*, Rohde said the city is the most economically divided it has been in a decade. The inequality in Manhattan, the city's wealthiest and most gentrified borough, "rivals parts of sub-Saharan Africa. Last year the wealthiest 20 percent of Manhattan residents made \$391,022 a year on average, according to [census data](#) [2]. The poorest 20 percent made \$9,681.

"All told, Manhattan's richest fifth made 40 times more money than its poorest fifth, up from 38 times in 2010. Only a handful of developing countries -- such as Namibia and Sierra Leone -- have higher inequality rates," Rohde writes.

*The Atlantic* column caught the attention of broadcast journalist and fellow New Yorker Amy Goodman, who [interviewed Rohde](#) [3] on "Democracy Now!" on Thursday. He comes across as compassionate rather than strident, and is quick to praise New Yorkers for a generosity that crossed political and socio-economic divides. But the storm unmasked the city's stark inequalities and reminds us that the consequences of climate change are harder on the poor than the rich.

In the "Democracy Now!" interview, Rohde makes another important point. Sandy's damage to the city's infrastructure, he said, provides New Yorkers with a glimpse of what life is like for people in war zones, "what it's like in Syria today as the civil war rages there, and what it was like in Iraq and Afghanistan. This will end for New Yorkers, but it will continue for people in those regions."

Rohde said he hopes the experience will make us more sympathetic to "the tumult in other places" now that "we see what it's like here ourselves."

From [the transcript of the interview](#) [3] with Rohde:

You know, this is a -- you know, for Americans, an experience of what it's like to be in one of these war zones, what it's like in Syria today as the civil war rages there, and what it was like in Iraq and Afghanistan. And this will end for New Yorkers, but it will continue for people in those regions. And my kind of takeaway from sort

of 15 years of coverage, from the war in Bosnia through Afghanistan and Iraq, is that, you know, we have more in common with people in these countries than we think. And we tend to have these kind of polarized views in the U.S. -- to be frank, on the left, you know, let's just get out, you know, we do more harm than good; and on the right, maybe sort of too much of a focus on military force. You know, there are moderate Afghans today in Kabul that are very afraid that the United States is leaving. And I think U.S. troops should leave Afghanistan. What I want to see is sort of us working more closely with moderates across the Middle East, the people in Benghazi that went out and protested after the American ambassador was killed, who sort of forced the hardline militia out of its base, and not relying on military force to help them, but helping them more with civilian aid, economic aid, helping them sort of get on their own feet and be functioning societies. We really do have allies in this region. The world is interconnected. We can't simply walk away from the Middle East and pretend it doesn't matter and that the oil there doesn't matter. And I guess that's my -- you know, I hope, in a way, this crisis will make -- A, it's a big test for government. I think people should watch it very closely, and maybe government is going to fail, but this is what government is for; and, B, I hope it, you know, makes people maybe somewhat more sympathetic for this -- what's happening in these countries when we read about this tumult in other places, and now we see what it's like here ourselves.

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[2] <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/20/nyregion/rich-got-richer-and-poor-poorer-in-nyc-2011-data-shows.html>

[3] [http://www.democracynow.org/2012/11/1/david\\_rohde\\_superstorm\\_sandy\\_has\\_exposed](http://www.democracynow.org/2012/11/1/david_rohde_superstorm_sandy_has_exposed)