

When the Titanic sunk in 1912 and many died in the freezing waters, everybody talked about it. To this day, there is hardly anybody who does not know of that fateful day in which a huge ship sunk and killed many. There's even a movie about it! So why is it that when Chicago had its own version of the Titanic in 1915, the Eastland Disaster, the people chose to forget about it? Why is it that the fact that over 800 people drowned in the Chicago River due to the tipping of the Eastland has been forgotten? Why is it that this great tragedy was not passed on through the generations? What is the cause of this social amnesia? Through an informal survey I performed, I have concluded that the most important factor of solving this mystery is asking oneself the question, "Why would the people not tell their descendants of what had happened in the Chicago River in 1915?"

In my informal survey, I spoke to twenty people, ten under the age of sixty and ten sixty and over. Of the younger people, only three had ever heard about the Eastland Disaster. Two of them had heard about it from their grandparents, who heard about the event when they were younger. The other person that knew had seen a flyer at DePaul University and wondered what it was. He then researched it on the Internet. The point here is that few younger people had ever heard about it; only two sets of grandparents had chosen to tell their descendants about that fateful day. Of the older people, five had heard about the Eastland Disaster. One of them found out about it because her mother had heard about it previously and told her all about it. The other four were friends and the only reason they all knew about it was because one of the woman's grandfather had told her and so she then told her friends about it. This is shocking! Why is it that, all being around the same age, only one of them had heard about it from their grandfather? What about the other women's grandparents? They were all from Chicago, their grandparents were around when it happened. So why is it that only one grandparent passed the story on, rather than all four of them? Some people simply chose not to tell their descendants of that day.

I think the social amnesia is definitely the result of the people who lived when the tragedy happened. For some odd reason, they chose not to tell their descendants about the 800 plus people that drowned in the Chicago River. The biggest question is "why?" Why would someone not pass the *story* of a tragedy on? Perhaps, they felt it was unimportant compared to what was going on at the time - the war. Maybe many did not hear about it right away and when they did they piled it on with the Titanic. But still, it did happen and many chose to forget and never talk about it again. I see nothing else to blame for the social amnesia but the people who chose not to pass such a tragedy on.

Perhaps understanding what the three major theoretical perspectives in sociology (Functionalist, Conflict, and Interactionist) would say about the social amnesia would help solve the mystery. Without doubt, the functionalist perspective would say that the social amnesia on the Eastland Disaster exists merely because the disaster does not contribute to society's stability or survival. In other words, preserving the memory of the tragedy is not necessary for our world now to thrive. The tragedy does not serve a purpose and is therefore not necessary to remember. On the other hand, the conflict perspective would say the Eastland Disaster has been forgotten because the people that died were "regular Joes." The people who died because of the Eastland Disaster were not rich, unlike the wealthy people who had died because of the Titanic. And so maybe it is because the people who died in 1915 were poor and, as many probably felt, contributed to nothing. The Interactionist perspective takes on another approach. When the Eastland Disaster occurred, families were literally wiped out. Thus, the people who had interacted with the ones who had died, the ones who lived and had a life with them, were also dead. There was nobody who actually cared deeply about the dead to carry on their memory. For it is usually the loved ones of the deceased that carry on the deceased's memory. Whatever perspective one might believe in, the sad truth is that there does exist a social amnesia on the Eastland Disaster.

Social amnesia, without a doubt, exists. I would define it as "when a society does not remember an event that occurred during a time in which all events belonging to that time are easily accessible to the society's memory." And again, I believe the main reason there exists a social amnesia when it comes to the Eastland Disaster is because the people who were around during the disaster chose not to tell their descendants about what happened, though they easily could have done so. All it takes is opening one's mouth and talking. Many people talk about things that are not even important, yet they chose to ignore a very important event of Chicago's history, one which only they could have passed on. But I also believe that perhaps the event was not passed on due to what had recently happened with the Titanic and with the war that was going on. After all, there are other tragedies that we remember. For example, the Chicago Fire is remembered, but then again, nothing major was going on at the time. But maybe it is remembered only because the fire affected the majority of the city. I mean it would be kind of hard to miss the fact that half the city was burned and that many were rebuilding the city.

Regardless of any explanations that others may come up with, I still hold on firmly to the theory that I have developed. People chose not to pass on the story of the tragedy and thus kept a very important part of Chicago's history selfishly locked away in their memory. It is the fault of those that decided that the fact that 800 plus people died that day was not important. It is the fault of those that decided that passing on the story of the tragedy of the Eastland Disaster was a waste of their saliva. I think that the excuse of saying that there were other events going on at the time is lame. After all, there were the few that did pass on the story, regardless of other happenings at the same time. If they were able to do that, I am quite sure that the others who were around could have done the same. But because they did not, we are now stuck with social amnesia. Thanks to the ones that chose to maintain their silence and forget about the 800 plus people that died that day social amnesia on the Eastland Disaster exists.