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## **The Eastland: Chicago's Forgotten Titanic**

Why don't we remember The Eastland Disaster? Surely the hundreds of lives lost in that tragic accident are worth remembering. Yet it seems as if nobody can recall ever hearing anything about this devastating phenomenon. The two different age groups incorporated into the survey should have, in my opinion, brought in completely different responses. However, I was surprised to discover that those persons over sixty years of age had barely heard of this incident. Sixty percent of those over sixty had never heard of the Eastland Disaster, while seventy percent of those under sixty had no prior knowledge of the demise of the Eastland in the Chicago River. These statistics are very close, and somewhat of a shock to me that the older generations hadn't heard of the disaster any more than the younger generation. I guess we will never know the real reason nobody remembers the accident, and maybe there isn't just one "real" reason. Perhaps it is a culmination of many different factors that all led to an unconscious society.

When the survey was conducted, I was given a number of varied responses. The two generations, those under and above sixty years of age, both had reoccurring themes. For those under sixty, the most popular response was something to the point of that our schools aren't teaching our students about the incident, so how could they possibly be expected to know about it. The response from the older of the two generations was understandably a bit different. They blamed the media for the overall unconsciousness of our society. Our society

is directed towards the media, be it through newspapers, magazines, radio, television, or the Internet, our people learn of pretty much everything we know as either a direct or indirect result of the media. The media has given this disaster no attention, so people don't know about it, and sadly enough, probably never will.

Using the three sociological perspectives, we may be able to discover new pieces to this puzzle as well as some answers to the question of why nobody knows of this tragedy? The three sociological perspectives are as follows: Conflict, Functionalist, and Interactionist.

I don't necessarily understand how the Eastland Disaster exactly fits into the Conflict Perspective, but I will give my best effort to analyze the subject with this particular sociological perspective. The best way I could put it together would be that perhaps the Titanic overshadowed the Eastland. In other words, the two disasters fought for the nations attention, and the Titanic was deemed the most tragic, unprecedented incident of the two, thereby creating the social amnesia that Americans seem to have regarding the Eastland Disaster.

The Functionalist Perspective may actually be a bit easier to understand in this situation. The fact that the Eastland Disaster did not really project a positive image in Chicago's history it could be said that the people of Chicago didn't want to project this image of Chicago to those from outside of the Chicago area, and therefore basically "forgot" about the disaster. Perhaps city officials didn't want the baggage and bad press that comes hand in hand with tragedies of those proportions.

This now leaves us with the Interactionist Perspective in which to look for explanations as to why nobody knows about the Eastland. What I brought out of putting the Eastland Disaster into the Interactionist Perspective was that people may have been to

emotionally hurt, or perhaps even embarrassed to talk about the fallen ship. When the people don't talk about the incident people block it from their minds and through the generations the accident is forgotten about, leaving few people who actually know of this travesty.

This is definitely a case of social amnesia, and probably one of the best examples that our country could offer. It is astounding that with the hugeness of this accident that no one knows or remembers the Eastland. It's as if the general public just dismissed this incident as if it had never happened, as if they didn't want to believe it could really be true, and certainly hoping not to remember. We, the United States, collectively blocked this tragedy not only from our minds and memories, but also from our history.

I find it quite bizarre that neither my parents nor I had heard of the Eastland Disaster before this year. An accident of such great proportion should have been taught to all of us in our American History classes, yet it was not. It is somewhat sad, and perhaps even disrespectful to the people aboard the Eastland, and even their friends and families, to keep this tragedy a well kept secret among historians and sociologists, and not have a memorial in remembrance of their lives. I believe they deserve it, and it's never too late to correct a national mistake...social amnesia about the Eastland.