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Sociology 101 - Dr. Fournier

Final Paper

EastLand Disaster

This was one of the most traumatic experiences to happen in Chicago yet no one really knows about it. This is very interesting considering over 800 people died right on the Chicago River. First I'll get around to answering the question of why many people don't know about the Eastland Disaster of 1915, then I'll touch base on how conflict, functionalist, and interactionist perspectives would be, and finally I'll discuss if there really is such a thing as Social Amnesia.

Why don't many people know about the Eastland Disaster of 1915? Well there are many answers to this. The younger group that I interviewed basically said that they think people don't know about it because it's not taught in school. Now this really is a major factor. In school they'll teach you about the Chicago fire but they fail to mention the Eastland Disaster. Through all my life I have never been taught in any grade about this disaster. It was never mentioned. It boggles me to think why in the world teachers fail to discuss this in classes. Upon interviewing the older group most responses said that the Titanic overshadowed it and that W.W.I was highlighting the papers. It was said that the Titanic was such a big deal because so many rich and important people were on that boat. When the Eastland went down it was more common people that lived in Chicago. This is why it wasn't made into a big ordeal. W.W.I was also mentioned as the case. It was said that it was on the front page of all the newspapers so the Eastland report got pushed back deep into the paper. The rest of the nation's concern was for the war, not something that happened in Chicago.

Conflict, Functionalist, and an Interactionist perspective would all differ. The Conflict would say that the crew had something to do with it. That they somehow knew that this was going to happen but chose not to inform the people. A Functionalist would say that maybe there was a purpose for this tragic event to happen. An Interactionist would go and observe what happened after the disaster and how people functioned together after this tragic disaster. Conflict would go and ask if the crew was informed of this, did any higher-ups know about the endangerment of the people, was anyone that was in charge know about this possible scenario, and so on. A Functionalist would start to examine to see if this was meant to be. They believe that everything has a purpose or else it would not exist. They would see how it impacted people's lives and to see if it caused any change in people's lives right away or even in the long run. An Interactionist would examine how all the people in Chicago interacted between themselves during this time of crisis. They would observe how everyone acts towards each other and what the mood of a society of a whole is compared to certain individuals.

I think social amnesia does exist. In the case of the Eastland Disaster I think that there were many factors that cause most of us to not remember. Of course you have the usual factors like W.W.I, Titanic, and so forth. What I feel is the cause of social amnesia is the trauma that was involved. If you think about it, if something that traumatic hits so close to home you really don't want to remember it. If you are a cousin, aunt, uncle, brother, sister, mother, father, etc. and your whole family perishes, you definitely do not want to remember. The pain has to be too severe for anyone to bear. You want to go on and try to rebuild your life. It is damn near impossible to do so if you can only think about this tragic event and if people constantly keep talking about it or asking questions about it. The human as a whole

cannot bear to hold so such pain and loss in their lives. We all have to pick up our broken selves and start to rebuild. For the sake of yourself and the rest of your family/society. It's easy for us to talk about and remember tragic things that happened in the past because most of us were not there to experience it first hand. It's a totally different feeling to experience something so traumatic in person than to just read about it or hear about it. This is why I believe so many people have social amnesia. Not only did it hit so close to home, but it hit way too hard into so many people's lives. It was just too much for anyone to bear in the Chicagoland area. People wanted to just forget about their huge losses and the fact of losing everything that they ever loved. I really couldn't tell you about any other events because I really don't know about what has happened. I think this is so for lack of teaching us as I was growing up. All I know is that people have a right to forget certain things because if they don't it could be the most dangerous thing for any human being. So the answer to the question is yes there is such a thing as social amnesia. When something this bad happens, we're all entitled to it.