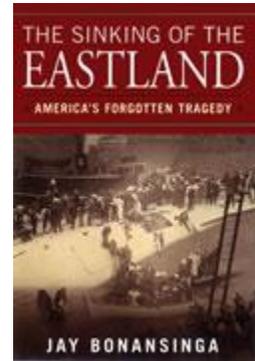


SINKING OF THE EASTLAND



1. Was anyone familiar with this disaster prior to reading this book? If you knew of the subject before, did you learn anything new about this event?
2. Why do you think a tragedy the magnitude of the Eastland would be semi-forgotten by history?
3. The Chicago Tribune editorial page blamed the tragedy on greed -- on the part of the ship's owners. Do you agree?
4. The Eastland impacted generations of Chicagoans personally. Is there anyone in this book group who has a family connection or a story?
5. Some have criticized the book for taking liberties with unknowable details, such as conversations, inner monologues, speculations on people's feelings and motives. How does the group feel about this issue?
6. What is the narration's most admirable quality? What did you like about the way Bonansinga told the story?
7. What did you find to be the most interesting events and developments in this book? What surprised you?
8. Discuss the book's structure and the author's use of language and writing style. How does the author draw the reader in and keep the reader engaged? What emotions does the author use to convey his story or something else?
9. Discuss the author's use of language and writing style. Does the book read like a collection of facts or more like a well-written, engaging narrative?
10. Have members read their favorite passage out loud. OR ... does anyone have a favorite passage or character? Personal stories?

11. Is this a time period (1915) that you knew a lot about before you read this book? If so, did you learn anything new? If not, did you come away with a greater understanding of what this particular time and place in history was actually like?
12. Talk about the time period in which the story is set. How well does the author convey the era? Did you have a sense of whether or not the author remained true to the events, social structures and political events of the time period?
13. Is it difficult to keep our own, modern-day experiences from influencing the reading of a historical tale? Can we imagine what life was really like for the characters within the context of the time period?
14. What did you learn about the time period in which the book is set that you did not previously know?
15. Is the dialogue (the vignettes) in the book believable? Does it seem to be indicative of the period and/or event being discussed?
16. What impact did the events in this book have on the course of history?
17. Did the book seem adequately researched? Why or why not?
18. How did this event impact history? How would you feel being a passenger on the re-constructed boat only to find out later it had been part of a disaster?
19. Has reading this book inspired you to do further research on the subject and the time period discussed?
20. What do you think will be your lasting impression of the book as a whole? How about the subject specifically?
21. What did you like or dislike about the book that hasn't been discussed already? Were you glad you read this book? Would you recommend it to a friend? Do you want to read more works about this event?

Questions 2-5 provided by Jay Bonansinga 10/22/09.

Remaining questions compiled by Gloria Drake, Oswego Public Library District.



Jay Bonansinga

Jay Bonansinga is the author of seven acclaimed suspense novels, as well as three original screenplays currently in development in Hollywood. The *Chicago Tribune* has called him 'one of the most imaginative writers of thrillers.' He has been a finalist for a Bram Stoker Award for best first novel, and was awarded the prestigious silver plaque at the Chicago International Film Festival for his directing.

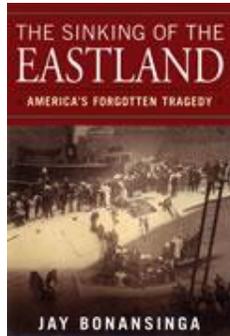
The holder of a master's degree in film from Columbia College Chicago, Bonansinga currently resides in Evanston, Illinois, with his wife and two sons. He is a visiting professor at Northwestern University in their Creative Writing for the Media program, and is a member in good standing of The Writers Guild of America and The Horror Writers Association.

In *The Sinking of the Eastland*, Jay Bonansinga applies his storytelling gifts to his first work of non-fiction, resulting in what could be called a 'historical thriller.'

This is the riveting story of Chicago's worst tragedy, which nearly ninety years later still ranks as one of America's most devastating disasters, in which 844 men, women and children died. It dramatically re-lives the fates of the tragedy's victims, survivors, heroes and villains, while masterfully detailing a unique, haunting period in American history.

A longtime resident of the Chicago area, he researched the story of the Eastland with the full support and cooperation of the Eastland Disaster Historical Society.

www.jaybonansinga.com



Books by Jay Bonansinga

Blood Hound *Frozen*
Head Case *Oblivion*
Perfect Victim *Sick*
The Black Mariah *Shattered*
The Killer's Game *Twisted*
The Sleep Police

Related Reads You May Enjoy

Disaster!: the great San Francisco earthquake and fire of 1906
by Dan Kurzman

The Eastland Disaster
by Ted Wachholz

Eastland: legacy of the Titanic
by George Woodman Hilton

Ghosts of the Titanic
by Charles Pellegrino

Great Chicago Fires
by David Cowan

Isaac's Storm: a man, a time, and the deadliest hurricane in history
by Erik Larson

Lusitania: an epic tragedy
by Diana Preston

Titanic Survivor
by Violet Jessop

Trapped: the 1909 Cherry Mine disaster
by Karen Tintori

Triangle: the fire that changed America
by David Von Drehle

<http://www.eastlanddisaster.org>

READ-ALIKE BOOKS FOR BOOK DISCUSSION

363.11 TIN	Karen Tintori	Trapped
551.552 LAR	Erik Larson	Isaac's Storm
910.91634 JES	Violet Jessop	Titanic Survivor
910.91634 PEL	Charles Pellegrino	Ghosts of the Titanic
940.4514 PRE	Diana Preston	Lusitania
974.71 VON	Dave Von Drehle	Triangle
977.311 COW	David Cowan	Great Chicago Fires
977.311 HIL	George Woodman Hilton	Eastland : legacy of the Titanic
977.311 SMI	Carl S. Smith	Urban Disorder
977.311 WAC	Ted Wachholz	The Eastland Disaster
979.4 KUR	Dan Kurzman	Disaster

INTERVIEW WITH EASTLAND AUTHOR JAY BONANSINGA

HOW DID YOU BECOME INTERESTED IN THE STORY?

I grew up in Illinois, and reveled in the state's folk lore -- from Honest Abe splitting rails to the Great Fire of 1871. Even the seamier mythology such as Al Capone and John Wayne Gacey fascinated my morbid young mind.

But one night, shortly after moving to Chicago in 1981, I was walking along the riverfront when a friend pointed at the water near the Clark Street bridge and said, "Did you know that part of the river is haunted?" He proceeded to tell me an error-laden thumbnail sketch of what happened in 1915. I was hooked.

For over two decades, the story of the wreck of the Eastland haunted my dreams. But what really got me thinking about writing a book was the dearth of literature on the subject. In fact, it seemed as though the whole event had been buried in obscurity. It was the worst disaster in the history of the city, in terms of loss-of-life, and few people had even heard of it!

AS AN ACCLAIMED NOVELIST, WHY DO A NON-FICTION BOOK?

It all goes back to my interest in "history as stories." I really believe the best way for people to understand history is through narratives. Stories. Drama. It's the way we understand who we are, where we came from, and where we're going. It goes back to the first story told by cave men sitting around the fire. And with the Eastland disaster, I could start from scratch. Up until now, there was never a published narrative on the disaster. That's why I chose an intimate, eye-witness tone for the book.

HOW DID YOU RESEARCH THE PROJECT?

I found a gold mine in Chicago -- mostly through the families of survivors. With the help of the Eastland Disaster Historical Society, I contacted the sons and daughters and grandchildren of victims. I dug up diaries and journals and oral histories. I interviewed relatives. And I augmented and fact-checked everything with the amazing Chicago Tribune archives at the Harold Washington Library Center.

All this enabled me to “get inside” the event. Which is the key to the book’s drama and universal appeal: It is a sensory experience. It reads like a novel. The reader is taken on board the ship, and over the edge -- literally -- into the filthy currents of the river. And yet it’s all true and meticulously documented!

WHAT IS THE NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS EVENT?

It’s an important event -- and a significant piece of American history -- on so many levels. Although U.S. maritime law did not change much as a result of the disaster, the Steamboat Inspection Service was shaken up in a major way. Stability tests became the standard from that point on. And the whole practice of having lifeboat space for every last passenger (in reaction to the Titanic) -- which made the Eastland top heavy -- began to decline after this incident.

But more importantly, the story itself is universal. It tells of human behavior in the extreme. It explores the tragic treatment of immigrants at the beginning of the industrial age. I really believe that one reason this event has been forgotten is because the Eastland victims were simple factory workers. There were no rich socialites on board. No Astors or Unsinkable Mollie Browns. These were blue collar immigrants -- cogs in the Great American Machine. And this book finally tells their stories. And last but not least, it’s a crackling great read. It’s designed to take a reader on an emotional roller coaster!

(provided by Jay Bonansinga 10/22/09)