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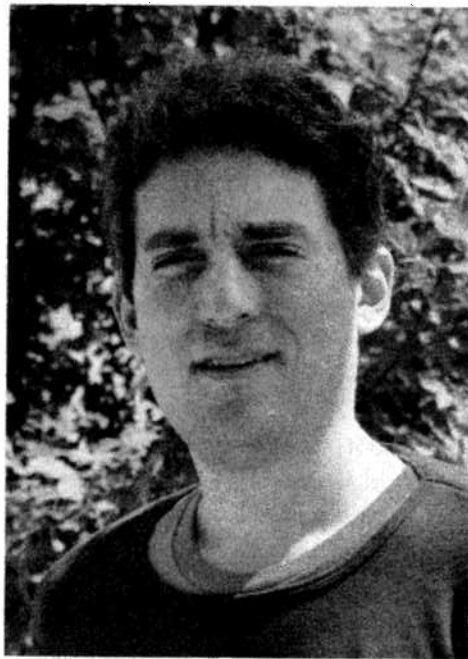
Are we on the Earth Titanic?

One night in April, 97 years ago, a ship crashed in the North Atlantic killing over 1,500 people. It was an event that generated news throughout the world. But based on nautical advancements and the Titanic's engineering, it wasn't supposed to happen.

Today, according to many scientists, we, humans, reside on a metaphorical Titanic. Our species is living in ways that are heavily dependent on technology and catastrophic change is predicted if we don't proceed cautiously and deliberately. Nearly a century later, it is instructive to consider the lessons learned by the Titanic episode and consider if any of them apply to us now. Our current situation parallels the Titanic of 1912 in eerie ways. Each has important things to tell us. First, there was an arrogance about the indestructibility of the largest passenger ship of its time. People then marveled at the advanced technology that became part of the Titanic. Specifically, many thought that icebergs weren't sufficient to do damage to such a colossal form of structural engineering.

Today, many people see the planet Earth as immense and amazingly complex. Some unfortunately jump from this observation to conclude that humans aren't capable of influencing the Earth in any significant way. There is also a technological optimism that permeates our modern culture. Some people are confident that if things really get bad, we can depend on new advances to prevent us from too much harm. Today, even most environmentalists see technology as our best hope for a better future.

Furthermore, nature, while brilliant and enigmatic, is still seen as controllable at a local scale—hence we spray poisons on our crops, irrigate, and build levees *ad infinitum*. These acts illustrate our continued effort to control nature and nature's willingness to capitulate.



Second, people were distributed on the Titanic along class lines—first, second, and third class sleeping quarters were separated with special accommodations and features available to the more affluent patrons. Our species is distributed in similar ways today.

Some live a life of drudgery, hardly getting a chance to explore (or even breathe fresh air or drink clean water), while others travel the planet enjoying its many fruits and treasures. In the Titanic's case, where you resided had a great deal to do with your likelihood of survival; more than 60 percent of 1st class passengers survived while less than 25 percent of the 3rd class passengers did. Similar disproportions exist today as well. Both internationally and nationally, class and life expectancy (LE) are strongly related; LE in developed countries (the "haves") is 77 years but only 67 years in less developed countries (the "have-nots").

Third, an insufficient number of life boats were available on the Titanic; nearly 50 percent too few, assuming that all were

properly filled. How many humans on Earth are severely malnourished; hunger today can only be attributable to poor management or callous attitudes (when such an overabundance of food exists)? Nearly a billion people, according to experts. Not only is food not properly distributed (leading to severe health problems) but more than 10,000 newborns die each day because of insufficient health care for the world's women and poor. We clearly still don't have enough "life boats" activated.

Fourth, the 2,000+ passengers aboard the ship had put a lot of responsibility in the hands of the ship's crew. Similarly, most of us put an enormous amount of authority in a "few" leaders; each one of our national Congressman represents over a half a million of us. Such a hierarchical system didn't work for the Titanic, why do we think it will work for us? Fifth, according to historical accounts, several warnings about large icebergs in the vicinity of their charted course were available to the Titanic's operators but they either failed to hear or heed them.

Are we not hearing warnings from all parts of this planet almost on a daily basis? If it isn't fires (in Greece), coal mine explosions (in China), oil spills (in Australia), drought conditions (in Mexico, worst in 68 years), vanishing lions (in Kenya), invasive clams (in Lake Tahoe), then it's the sizzling oceans (globally the warmest ever for any previous July). (If you didn't hear of these recent events/findings, all this past month, you are relying too much on mainstream media. See the Environmental News Network, <www.enn.com>, for something more substantive.)

We know what the consequences were for the crew's negligence. What are/will be the consequences of ours? Sixth, historical records tell us that the ship's lookouts only saw the fated iceberg when

the ship was ~1500 feet ahead of it. Though orders to turn were almost immediately taken, it was too late; less than a minute elapsed between sighting and collision. When will we turn our "ship"? Will it be too late? In the case of the Titanic, the forward momentum of the ship, which itself was recklessly moving at a brisk pace at the time, was too great to overcome. With modern expansions in the use of fossil fuels, synthetic chemicals, raw materials, and land, does/will our civilization have too much momentum to abruptly change course? In the end, the Titanic did crash into a known entity—large icebergs weren't uncommon in the northern Atlantic—and more than a thousand people died. Remarkably, over seven hundred people survived.

The last known survivor, Millvina Dean, died just this summer at age 97. According to Millvina, the reason why she, her brother, and her mother died, was because her father told them to get dressed and move to the deck in response to the jolt that he felt that dreadful night. Ironically, his "third class" family survived but he perished, as it was protocol to let women and children board the lifeboats first.

Who will board our "lifeboats" first? Will children be considered "special" passengers or will they be thrown into the "freezing" water? Considering how despicably millions of children are allowed to live in our world today (due to no fault of their own), is there any doubt that they will be ignored or trampled? Who are we trampling now?

The Titanic has much to teach us, if we were open to learn. Some say that history repeats itself. I don't know for sure, but I suspect this might be because too many resign themselves to this outcome. Some historical paths might be avoided if we were more conscientious and responsive to the factors that influence history. Are you prepared to right this (wayward) ship?