



Down with the Old Canoe: A Cultural History of the Titanic Disaster (Updated Edition)

By Steven Biel

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"Brimming over with wit and insight...Fresh and fascinating." ?Dan Rather

Everyone from suffragists to their opponents; radicals, reformers, and capitalists; critics of technology and modern life; racists and xenophobes and champions of racial and ethnic equality; editorial writers and folk singers, preachers and poets found moral and cultural lessons in the sinking of the *Titanic*.

In a new edition that both commemorates the one hundredth anniversary of the disaster and elaborates, in a revised afterward, on the ship's continued impact on the public imagination (evidenced by the *Titanic* mania evoked by James Cameron's 1997 film), Steven Biel explores the *Titanic* in all its complexity and contradictions. 16 pages of black-and-white photographs and illustrations

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

The largest movable object ever constructed by man when it was launched, the supposedly unsinkable Titanic has inspired novels, songs, poetry, movies, and even a mysterious black stoker named Shine who never existed on the actual ship. Steven Biel traces all these avatars and explores the social and cultural myths that the disaster gave rise to--and destroyed. The recent attempts to raise the Titanic's wreckage have demonstrated that the myths have not lost their power.

From Publishers Weekly

Another book on the Titanic, but this one deals not with how the great ship went down but rather with the disaster as a cultural icon and how, from the very beginning, in 1912, it has been used to promote all manner of ideological positions. Biel's tone is sometimes stiffly academic, sometimes almost playful, but his curiosity, fortified by a good deal of inspired research, has produced a new look at an old story that is both entertaining and instructive. The first half deals with the immediate reaction to the sinking. Feminists and anti-feminists fought over the meaning of the traditional naval call of "women and children first": Did it reflect chivalry? Or the infantilization of women? Socialists used the sinking to attack the excesses of capitalism. The vessel surfaced in folk music, especially in the black community, where an entire genre of sometimes ribald verses about a black crew member named Shine flourished. The second half of the book deals with how the Titanic's story has been preserved. Biel (Independent Intellectuals in the United States, 1910-1945) examines films (including a Nazi propaganda movie), novels (Danielle Steel, Clive Cussler) and music (even Bob Dylan) and spends a good deal of time on Walter Lord's *A Night to Remember*, as a book (1955), TV show (1956) and film (1958). Biel concludes his provocative social history with a look at various clubs formed by Titanic enthusiasts and at efforts to exploit the wreckage of the ship. Photos.

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From Library Journal

Biel (Independent Intellectuals in the United States, New York Univ., 1992) proves here that there is always a need for another book on the Titanic. What is so refreshing about Biel's work is that it doesn't focus on the sinking of the vessel but on how the tragedy affected the social and cultural life of America. Biel provides some fascinating insights into what was happening in America at that time (April 15, 1917) and how people used the ship's sinking to prove their own theories. For example, the suffrage movement used it to drum up support for the 19th Amendment, while ministers often pointed to the sinking of the ship as a sign of God's wrath. The strength of this well-written and -researched book is the inclusion of poetry, songs, and cartoons illustrating different facets of American life in the early 20th century. Biel has provided a humorous and poignant look at a disaster that still fascinates us. Recommended for both general readers and scholars. ?Richard P. Hedlund, Ashland Community Coll., Ky.

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Users Review

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