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Writing 181: Writing Studies

11 November 2019

Research Proposal:

Urban Legends

Introduction:

My intent is to focus my research on the reasons for the existence of urban legends. In my opinion, this topic is extremely important due to the fact that these tales, also referred to as “contemporary legends”, have fascinated generations, persisted through time, and even inspired various forms of art. Through this research, I hope to find out how, and why, such stories are created, using as a case study perhaps the most detailed of such urban legends: The horrifying mystery of the *S.S. Ourang Medan*. I am more curious about whether there is any truth to this specific incident than to any other such tale.

Important Questions within the original question:

Why do urban legends exist?

Who creates these types of stories?

How do they manage to conceive them?

Why do some of them persist, no matter how many years have passed?

Is there any truth to the *Ourang Medan* tragedy?

Sources:

Brunvard, Jan H. *Encyclopedia of Urban Legends*. W.W. Norton & Compny, 2002.

This book discusses several urban legends, along with their origin stories, attempting to understand their origins, and providing their background stories. It also offers information on the concept of the urban legends in general, and organizations studying them.

Surprising preliminary research facts:

* Urban legends are told so many times through history, that they persist through generations, despite having little or no evidence of having ever taken place.
* They often offer the audience a moral lesson, while at the same time informing them about the routines, problems, and fears of the society that created them. Method:

The question is to be investigated by the collection of sources, and the drawing of necessary information from them. This information will be analyzed and interconnected, so as to produce a comprehensive report.

Objective:

The objective of this research project is to provide clarity on the cultural and social significance of contemporary legends in society.

Resources:

The resource most frequently utilized for this task will be the internet, although a physical book from the Goucher College Library will also be used.

Estelle. “The Myth of the Ourang Medan Ghost Ship, 1940.” *The Skittish Library*, 7 Feb. 2016, <http://skittishlibrary.co.uk/the-myth-of-the-ourang-medan-ghost-ship-1940/>.

A blogger by the username of ESTELLE finds two newspaper articles telling of the *Ourang Medan* tragedy dated November 21st, 1940, and November 22nd, 1940. That is a an entire 7 years before the next most recent report in June of 1947. He tracks the story to a man named Silvio Scherli, and is certain that Scherli made the story up completely, in order to gain recognition from the world. This article is the most recent breakthrough in the case of the *Ourang Medan*, dating to 2015.

The Philadelphia Experiment From A-Z. (2019). *The Death Ship The Dutch Freighter SS Ourang*. [online] Available at: https://www.de173.com/the-ss-ourang-medan/ [Accessed 13 Nov. 2019].

This source examines the case of the *S.S. Ourang Medan* in one of the most detailed accounts on the web. It references several theories proposed as explanations for the fate of the crew, focusing mostly on the “chemical poisoning” theory. It links the vessel to a Japanese Military unit which conducted deadly biological, chemical and other such experiments, and could have been to blame for the ship’s loss. This website even includes a letter addressed from one CIA official to another, discussing the possible causes of the disaster.

The Conversation. (2019). *Why urban legends are more powerful than ever*. [online] Available at: https://theconversation.com/why-urban-legends-are-more-powerful-than-ever-76718 [Accessed 13 Nov. 2019].

This article discusses the meanings, reasonings, and societal messages behind urban legends. It analyzes the origins and benefits of these tales from a psychological standpoint.

Whipps, H. (2019). *Urban Legends: How They Start and Why They Persist*. [online] livescience.com. Available at: https://www.livescience.com/7107-urban-legends-start-persist.html [Accessed 13 Nov. 2019].

Similarly to the previous source, this article discusses the psychology of urban legends, offering several examples.

Harvey, I. (2016). *The strange case of the Ourang Medan ghost ship*. [online] The Vintage News. Available at: https://www.thevintagenews.com/2016/11/03/the-strange-case-of-the-ourang-medan-ghost-ship/ [Accessed 13 Nov. 2019].

Yet another article retelling the case of the *S.S. Ourang Medan* and speculating what might have happened to her crew.

Bermudatrianglecentral.blogspot.com. (2019). *<i>Ourang Medan</i>*. [online] Available at: https://bermudatrianglecentral.blogspot.com/2013/11/ourang-medan.html [Accessed 13 Nov. 2019].

This source apparently puts the *Ourang Medan* incident in place on November 13, 1939, and offers a very detailed account of her demise. What’s more, it offers the route of the ship and the conditions on board prior to the deaths of the crew, something no online source has done before.

Dagnall, N. (2017). *Bookmarkable URL intermediate page*. [online] Eds.a.ebscohost.com. Available at: https://eds.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?vid=0&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZSZzY29wZT1zaXRl [Accessed 14 Nov. 2019].

This source discusses the correlation between schyzotypy and belief in the paranormal. They also include belief in urban legends as related to schizotypy. They present the results of several tests they conducted to observe people’s ability to believe in the extraordinary.

Thinking Sideways Podcast. (2013). *The Ourang Medan*. [online] Available at: http://www.thinkingsidewayspodcast.com/the-ourang-medan/ [Accessed 14 Nov. 2019].

This website contains a podcast with an interview with Roy Bainton, an author who played a key role in the investigation of the Ourang Medan incident.

Stubbersfield, J. (2015). *Bookmarkable URL intermediate page*. [online] Eds.a.ebscohost.com. Available at: https://eds.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?vid=0&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZSZzY29wZT1zaXRl [Accessed 14 Nov. 2019].

This is a study about the bias of survival and social information within urban legends, and the three phases of such a bias. Individuals of 18-52 years old were tested by being asked how much they are interested in reading a story beyond the headline.

Cotter, E. (2008). *Bookmarkable URL intermediate page.* [online]Eds.a.ebscohost.com. Available at: *https://eds.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?vid=0&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZSZzY29wZT1zaXRl* [Accessed 14 Nov. 2019].

This article tells about an experiment where several subjects read 15 urban legends, and let the scientists make several correlations, such as between one’s familiarity with a legend, and their intent to tell about it. They also examine the role fear plays in the intentions of the subjects.

Brunvand, J. (n.d.). *Encyclopedia of urban legends*. NEW YORK: W.W. Norton and Company.

In this astonishing book, Jan Harold Brunvard writes about over 150 urban legends, explaining their possible meaning and origin, as well as providing us with information about classifications of urban legends, organizations investigating them, and much more.

Awfultrue - Paranormal stories, Creepy places, Horror storys - books, Ghost stories. (2019). *Dutch SS Ourang Medan*. [online] Available at: https://awfultrue.com/dutch-ss-ourang-medan/ [Accessed 20 Nov. 2019].

Another source concerning the story of the *Ourang Medan*, and a maritime historian’s great effort to discover her origins.

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