

Introduction - We're ALL IN The Same Boat: Establishing Common Ground

"In a time of domestic crisis, men of goodwill and generosity should be able to unite regardless of party or politics. ...For, in a democracy, every citizen, regardless of his interest in politics, 'holds office'; every one of us is in a position of responsibility; and, in the final analysis, the kind of government we get depends upon how we fulfill those responsibilities. We, the people, are the boss, and we will get the kind of political leadership, be it good or bad, that we demand and deserve." – John F. Kennedy

Imagine you're on a massive cruise ship on a multiple-year journey around the world. Everything functions like a well-oiled machine and everyone on board is enjoying life, from the professional crew and staff residing in modest accommodation below deck to the wealthy passengers in the luxury cabins, everyone gets along fine, all together, on the same boat.

Now imagine an alternative experience on a different ship with a significant portion of the crew and many dissatisfied passengers constantly clamoring for resistance to the captain and his officers while doing little themselves to achieve much of anything beyond disrupting the collective peace on board. Everywhere you look you see deficiencies and problems being neglected and nobody taking responsibility to address the numerous issues—from subtle to structural problems, from communication breakdowns to safety concerns, from services to efficiency, nothing is getting done well, if at all. Leadership at the helm seems oblivious and/or distracted and hindered by the struggle for control of the vessel. The ship is in decline and disarray, and while most passengers complain about how lousy everything is, few have taken any initiative to organize a united effort to improve the situation.

As a passenger, you are at a loss—unsatisfied with the overall experience and feeling disconnected from almost all the other passengers and crew. At times you consider how you could pitch in to help improve things, but organizing others to make a real difference feels like a daunting task that you don't see as your responsibility or even within your capabilities. The motivation to invest such time and effort for little to no reward is sorely lacking in the vast majority of passengers—and upon reflection, you likely understand why from your own experience.

I believe this latter imagery is analogous to what it's like for countless Americans today, particularly over the past decade. All of us, regardless of political views or affiliation, would greatly prefer to experience life in America more analogous to the first scenario than the second. In this respect, among others, we are all in the same boat.

Consider for a moment an important but not widely known detail about what happened to the Titanic. There's something particularly unsettling about why that great ship—and 1,500 souls—were lost back in 1912. It was April, peak iceberg season in the North Atlantic. Lookouts were posted, of course, but they lacked a basic tool that likely would have made all the difference: a simple pair of binoculars that were locked away in a cabinet for which the key was missing.

Rather than break it open or report the issue to a superior officer, the men simply carried on without them. Meanwhile, the captain Edward Smith was under pressure from Jay Bruce Ismay, Managing Director of the White Star Line, to complete the transatlantic crossing in record time so as to grab headlines for marketing purposes, as documented in the subsequent inquiries and later dramatized in James Cameron's film. Despite the known danger and apparently without even consulting the lookouts to assess visibility and the risk of ice, the decision was made to maintain an incautious pace. Like so many other preventable disasters, poor judgment and a lack of foresight by decision makers proved tragically fatal. That the captain and senior officers apparently never even assessed visibility and required reaction time remains difficult to comprehend—a fatal failure of leadership.

What we now face in America—and will continue to for years to come—is a similarly perilous situation. Without proper perspective and risk analysis, our nation faces its own preventable disaster. Much like those missing binoculars on the Titanic, we need tools to help us see what has really been going on in the USA over the past decade, as well as further back in our history. *The Same Boat* is meant to function as a lens through which readers can see the bigger picture as well as the significant details more clearly, outlining in broader strokes how we arrived at the current status quo. If more of us can recognize the real threats which can eventually sink Ship America, we stand a better chance of changing course before it's too late.

Our ship faces a perfect storm of challenges ahead—a fiscal crisis of epic proportions as the national debt has doubled twice since Obama first took office, cultural and political division, unprincipled leadership, a crippling healthcare crisis, and the list goes on. Combined, these circumstances leave the U.S.S. America in a weak position to weather another major crisis that could blindside us like a rogue wave on any given day. Consider 9/11, the 2008 financial crisis, and COVID-19—three major examples in just a quarter century. The question is not if we will face another major crisis, but when. How will our ship handle the threatening seas ahead while in an increasingly weakened state? Will the ideologically divided crew and passengers pull together, cooperate to strengthen and improve the vessel and its operation, or will we allow the worsening conditions to continue unabated until our vessel is irreversibly damaged or transformed beyond recognition?

I believe these troubling images accurately reflect our current national condition. And while those in the luxury cabins may remain insulated for now, even they may ultimately have to face life-altering consequences if our ship's integrity does not prevail. All Americans have a tremendous stake in what becomes of our nation, and together we can achieve practically anything. Divided and without leadership that can rally the vast majority of the masses behind a Common Cause, our nation is severely compromised in its ability to master its multiple maladies. The country obviously has a lot going for it, but we also face serious challenges and problems that need to be solved before they become unmanageable without complete upheaval. If left unchecked, these issues can only lead to a downward spiral that could permanently transform the nation—almost certainly not for the better.

Another way I mean the metaphor behind the title of this book—*The Same Boat*—is that we've all been watching the same political drama unfold in America over the past decade. Most of us have experienced the feeling of being practically overwhelmed at some point or another in recent

years by the relentless stream of information, misinformation, and disinformation coming at us daily. Understanding even one of the numerous controversial issues relatively thoroughly since 2016 requires an investment in time and research. Knowing the details on all of them is a full-time job which few of us have time for nor earn any compensation. In this sense too, we're all in the same boat, living through a turbulent era shaped by numerous challenging factors including a hyper-politicized situation, politicized media, a daily deluge of information, powerful Big Tech companies, filter bubbles, censorship, and rapid technological advancement.

For Americans to come together in, or despite this complex, conflicting and highly confusing state of affairs is extremely challenging. Yet, if a house divided indeed cannot stand, as Abraham Lincoln once famously said, then it would be imperative that Americans come together, lest our nation ultimately fail. Nevertheless, the power struggle for control over the helm of our great vessel persists, with leaders on both sides making divisive statements and gestures that inflame rather than heal, appealing to their bases rather than seeking genuine unity.

One might reasonably assume that all Americans would rather see the nation thrive than struggle or go off the cliff entirely. Unfortunately, this is not the case. There are many people—both Americans and others—who want to see America fundamentally transformed or even fail outright. For that to happen, the nation must first be divided, which it undeniably is. We need to recognize this reality: America's division serves the interests of those who wish to see it weakened or destroyed. An adversary seeking to divide and conquer would naturally want us to dismiss any such analysis as mere "conspiracy theory." Recognizing these realities must become part of our Common Knowledge if we hope to heal the divide.

This book aims primarily to establish more Common Knowledge—with the premise that it is a prerequisite to establishing more Common Ground. I believe this is the most sensible way to begin healing the divide. To understand our divisions, we need to identify and define them first. I do this in the first chapter, then elaborate in chapters 2, 3, and 4 on each of the three primary dividing lines in America today. Chapter 5 examines Trump himself and what I would say to him if I had his ear for 15 minutes. In my conclusion, I propose a Relaunch Platform built on Our Commons and Virtue Centered Leadership as a path toward a more unified and prosperous future.

We are all in the same boat, and for our boat to reach the destinations most Americans would agree are desirable, we need to cooperate more as well as more effectively. In Chapter 6, I outline how every American can participate in what could become a national project toward a better future, together. That journey begins here.

Welcome Aboard!