## Third Place - High School - Non-Fiction/Essay

Titanic: The Loss of American History

By Haley Lash

On a brisk morning in April 1912, 1,503 newly boarded passengers hung over the polished brass guardrails and waved to their loved ones for the last time. Down below, lively young men that were given a discount on their round trip ticket began repetitively tossing coal into a blazing inferno. The virgin turbines began to rotate and churn the water, leaving the once noisy crowd awestruck. Sunlight danced across the sea, leaving the ship's name jumbled across the top of the water. Its title radiated the two years of effort and work of thousands of men, and as it pulled out of the dock everyone in the crowd silently spoke its name- RMS Titanic.

To many at the time, the Titanic was a luxury on water. Her sleek exterior featured four smokestacks, three of which actually worked (the other was added for looks.) The ship also included a heated swimming pool, a total of four electric elevators, two libraries, and a fully staffed medical clinic. Electric and heating were accommodations added to all 840 rooms, a rare luxury that a wealthy first class and crowded third class family could enjoy. Astonishingly, in our economy today it would cost over \$400 million to recreate the Titanic down to its expensive first class silverware.

Despite its elegant class, it was also clear that the Titanic overlooked safety while designing their prize worthy ship. She carried just 20 lifeboats that when filled to full capacity, would only have saved half of the population on board the ship. Though the Titanic could have held 32, the White Star Line concluded that too many lifeboats was unneeded and would take up valuable space for more luxurious details to be added during construction.

Throughout the day of April 14, the Titanic received several wireless messages from neighboring ships all entailing iceberg sightings. Despite the warnings, Captain Smith had sailed through waters laced with icebergs before and so in turn, found no plausible reason to slow down or change course. The Titanic had been sailing smoothly for two days, and despite having to alter the overall course by ten miles to avoid an iceberg collision earlier that day, the ship's sailing record was flawless. However, up in the crow's nest, lookout Frederick Fleet spotted a shadowy object slinking around in the distance.

Thirty seven seconds after Fleet telephoned the bridge and rang the warning bell three times, the right side of the Titanic collided with an Atlantic iceberg. The collision ripped open five of the

overall sixteen watertight compartments, with a sixth already beginning to fill up. The Titanic's builder Thomas Andrews later informed Captain Smith that the ship could stay afloat with only the first four compartments filled with water; the once great ship was bound to sink. Andrews concluded that a single hour was between the Titanic's maiden voyage and the bottom of the frigid Atlantic Ocean.

Twenty five minutes after the initial collision, Smith began ordering women and children onto the ship's 12 wooden lifeboats. Water began engulfing dingy third class cabins, and miscommunication between the upper and lower decks caused officers to start locking the gates leading up to the boat deck, sealing the lid to hundreds of watery graves. Rumor spread from passenger to passenger, explaining that the Titanic could stay afloat much longer than what Andrews had estimated, so by the time the first lifeboat was dropped into the water, only twenty eight people were inside (a typical lifeboat could hold up to 65.)

After the rest of the wooden lifeboats were sent off, those still stranded on the Titanic began piling into the four collapsible lifeboats located on top of the officer's quarters. With only several minutes left, the two wireless operators on duty, Jack Phillips and Harold Bride continued to try and contact any ships close enough for assistance. After getting several responses, they concluded that the closest ship, the RMS Carpathia, was still four hours away from the ship in peril. Their last chance disappeared when a mystery ship located ten miles away, didn't respond to Morse code or rocket flares shot out every fifteen minutes.

After losing power and splitting in half, the Titanic slipped under the Atlantic Ocean just two hours and forty minutes after hitting an iceberg. The Carpathia arrived two and a half hours later, rescuing those who had endured not only the horror of being on a doomed ship, but also the devastating loss of those closest to them. Later on, the death toll revealed that only 32% of the entire ship's population survived, and most of the survivors were from the wealthy first class. The Titanic not only unknowingly went down with all its luxuries that night, but it also kidnapped the lives of many who could have been saved.