Passage Set: Titanic Disaster: Who or What is to Blame?

Source 1: A “TITANIC” Number of Mistakes.

Adapted From: http://www.historyofthetitanic.org/

1 There is no question that a number of mistakes contributed to the sinking of The Titanic. Captain E. J. Smith was sailing his retirement voyage as the Titanic was making her maiden trip. Smith reportedly did not give orders to slow the ship despite reports of icebergs in the water, a common practice at the time. Smith also ignored a total of seven iceberg warnings from other ships and his own crew. Mr. J. Bruce Ismay, the Director of Titanic’s company, the White Star Line, was on board the ship. Some people think Ismay pressured Captain Smith to maintain high speed. He wanted to prove The Titanic could make a six-day crossing across the Atlantic Ocean.

2 Another mistake occurred during the building process. Substandard iron was used in the rivets holding the iron plates of the ship. The collision with the iceberg sheared the rivets and caused many sections of the ship to collapse. Yet another mistake was in the design of the watertight compartments. They did not reach as high as they should have because the increased height would have cut into the living quarters of the first class staterooms.

3 Besides the actual sinking, the ship carried only enough lifeboats for about one-third of the passengers and crew. This led to increased loss of life. There was only 20 lifeboats on the Titanic. That was enough to save only 1/3 of the crew and passengers on board the boat. It was originally designed to carry 32 boats, but the number was decreased because designers felt the deck would be extremely cluttered.

4 It was believed that ships were safer and less likely to require lifeboats. After the disaster, laws requiring a minimum number of lifeboats were changed immediately.

5 Not all the mistakes were made by people directly connected with the Titanic. Another ship, The Californian, had stopped for the night only 19 miles from the doomed ship. When the Titanic fired distress rockets, the Californian’s captain decided the rockets were being fired because the Titanic was partying. The Californian’s radio had been turned off, and she missed the Titanic’s distress call. If the radio been on, the Californian should have been able to save all the passengers.

6 Close to 100 years after the Titanic went down, yet another possible mistake was discovered. The granddaughter of an officer on board the Titanic claimed the man at the wheel turned right instead of left. This put the ship on a collision course with the iceberg. Louise Patten says her grandfather—who survived the sinking—lied about the mistake. He wanted to prevent lawsuits against his employers and to protect his job. If this is true, despite all the other mistakes, in the end it may have been a simple misunderstanding that led to a titanic mistake.
Source 2: Responsibility for the Titanic Disaster

Adapted from: The Literary Digest, May 4, 1912

7 There will always be a certain element of mystery will always be part of the loss of the Titanic. Certain facts are known only to the dead captain and first officer. More answers are hidden forever at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean. However, some of the unknown is being cleared up by patient and thorough investigation. The world wants to know where to put the blame. As the passengers, officers, and members of the crew tell their stories and answer questions, the horror of the Titanic’s sinking only increases when the needless loss of life becomes more and more evident.

8 Passengers, owners, and officers all were obsessed with the idea that the ship was “unsinkable.” The design of modern passenger ships, with the new water-tight compartments, had kept authorities from requiring additional safety measures. However, the water-tight compartments were flawed. They were not built to original design specifications. The owners decided they wanted the decks to be less cluttered and more open for passengers to enjoy the views. Thinking the Titanic would never sink, they removed all but 20 lifeboats. This was not enough life boats, which meant not everyone could safely escape the sinking ship.

9 The Titanic was sailing at high speeds where icebergs were abundant. With no time to change direction or avoid hitting the iceberg, the ship became damaged beyond its ability to stay afloat. Even after the Titanic collided with the iceberg, the crew believed the water-tight compartments would keep the ship from sinking. They were wrong.

10 The lack of preparation before the collision and the crew not filling the life-boats to their capacity are both part of the deadly belief that the Titanic was unsinkable.

11 People do not want to just blame the faulty design of the “unsinkable ship.” They also want to know who is responsible. Two people have been mentioned as being partly to blame: Captain Smith and J. Bruce Ismay. The captain went down with his ship. Many of the public want to remember him in a respectful and loving way. However, the New York Times reported the following:

12 “Ice was in plain sight, floating ice and bergs. Not only that, by Captain Smith had received by wireless messages at least three warnings that icebergs were in his path...yet straight into the jaws of destruction he steamed at high speed...”

13 The New York Times also gives J. Bruce Ismay and the White Star Line, which owned the Titanic, some of the responsibility as well. The company pressured Captain Smith to complete the voyage at high speeds. Special reasons for desiring a speedy voyage on the Titanic’s maiden trip were found. The company’s financial condition was becoming more difficult. Investors thought it would be good for future business if the Titanic had a successful and fast passage from England to the United States. “Everybody learns from experience,” observed Mr. Ismay. He also believes that in this crisis, the steamship owners of the world have learned “that too much reliance has been placed on water-tight compartments and that they must equip every vessel with life-boats and rafts sufficient to provide for every soul on board...”

14 They have learned, too, that “there are no such things as unsinkable ships.”
CHAPTER III - THE COLLISION (abridged)

I had been fortunate enough to secure a two-berth cabin to myself quite close to the saloon and most convenient in every way for getting about the ship.

After undressing and climbing into the top berth, I read from about quarter-past eleven to the time we struck, about quarter to twelve. During this time I noticed particularly the increased vibration of the ship, and I assumed that we were going at a higher speed than at any other time since we sailed from Queenstown. Now I am aware that this is an important point, and bears strongly on the question of responsibility for the effects of the collision; but the impression of increased vibration is fixed in my memory so strongly that it seems important to record it.

And then, as I read in the quietness of the night, broken only by the muffled sound that came to me through the ventilators of stewards talking and moving along the corridors, when nearly all the passengers were in their cabins, some asleep in bed, others undressing, and others only just down from the smoking-room and still discussing many things, there came what seemed to me nothing more than an extra heave of the engines and a more than usually obvious dancing motion of the mattress on which I sat. Nothing more than that—no sound of a crash or of anything else: no sense of shock, no jar that felt like one heavy body meeting another. And presently the same thing repeated with about the same intensity. The thought came to me that they must have still further increased the speed. And all this time the Titanic was being cut open by the iceberg and water was pouring in her side, and yet no evidence that would indicate such a disaster had been presented to us. It fills me with astonishment now to think of it.

And so, with no thought of anything serious having happened to the ship, I continued my reading; and still the murmur from the stewards and from adjoining cabins, and no other sound: no cry in the night; no alarm given; no one afraid—there was then nothing which could cause fear to the most timid person. But in a few moments I felt the engines slow and stop; the dancing motion and the vibration ceased suddenly after being part of our very existence for four days, and that was the first hint that anything out of the ordinary had happened. We have all "heard" a loud-ticking clock stop suddenly in a quiet room, and then have noticed the clock and the ticking noise. So in the same way the fact was suddenly brought home to all in the ship that the engines—that part of the ship that drove us through the sea—had stopped dead. But the stopping of the engines gave us no information: we had to make our own calculations as to why we had stopped. I jumped out of bed, slipped on a dressing-gown over pajamas, put on shoes, and went out of my cabin into the hall near the saloon. Here was a steward leaning against the staircase, probably waiting until those in the smoke-room above had gone to bed and he could put out the lights. I said, "Why have we stopped?"

"I don't know, sir," he replied, "but I don't suppose it is anything much."

"Well," I said, "I am going on deck to see what it is," and started towards the stairs.
He smiled indulgently at me as I passed him, and said, "All right, sir, but it is mighty cold up there."
I climbed the three flights of stairs, opened the vestibule door leading to the top deck, and stepped out into an atmosphere that cut me, clad as I was, like a knife. Walking to the starboard side, I peered over and saw the sea many feet below, calm and black; forward, the deserted deck stretching away to the first-class quarters and the captain's bridge; and behind, the steerage quarters and the stern bridge; nothing more: no iceberg on either side or astern as far as we could see in the darkness. There were two or three men on deck, and with one I compared notes of our experiences. He had just begun to undress when the engines stopped and had come up at once, so that he was fairly well-clad; none of us could see anything, and all being quiet and still, the Scotchman and I went down to the next deck.

Through the windows of the smoking-room we saw a game of cards going on, with several onlookers, and went in to enquire if they knew more than we did. They had apparently felt rather more of the heaving motion, but so far as I remember, none of them had gone out on deck to make any enquiries, even when one of them had seen through the windows an iceberg go by towering above the decks. He had called their attention to it, and they all watched it disappear, but had then at once resumed the game. We asked them the height of the berg and some said one hundred feet, others, sixty feet; one of the onlookers—a motor engineer travelling to America with a model carburetor—said, "Well, I am accustomed to estimating distances and I put it at between eighty and ninety feet." We accepted his estimate and made guesses as to what had happened to the Titanic: the general impression was that we had just scraped the iceberg with a glancing blow on the starboard side, and they had stopped as a wise precaution, to examine her thoroughly all over.

"I expect the iceberg has scratched off some of her new paint," said one, "and the captain doesn't like to go on until she is painted up again." We laughed at his estimate of the captain's care for the ship. Poor Captain Smith!—he knew by this time only too well what had happened.

As I passed to the door to go down, I looked forward again and saw to my surprise an undoubted tilt downwards from the stern to the bows: only a slight slope, which I don't think anyone had noticed,—at any rate, they had not remarked on it. As I went downstairs a confirmation of this tilting forward came in something unusual about the stairs, a curious sense of something out of balance and of not being able to put one's feet down in the right place: naturally, being tilted forward, the stairs would slope downwards at an angle and tend to throw one forward. I could not see any visible slope of the stairway: it was perceptible only by the sense of balance at this time.

Turning into my gangway (my cabin being the first in the gangway), I saw a man standing at the other end of it fastening his tie. "Anything fresh?" he said. "Not much," I replied; "we are going ahead slowly and she is down a little at the bows, but I don't think it is anything serious." I left them and went again to my cabin. I put on some underclothing, sat on the sofa, and read for some ten minutes, when I heard through the open door, above, the noise of people passing up and down, and a loud shout from above: "All passengers on deck with lifebelts on."