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Dodge, Washington. "Eyewitness Account of Sinking of the *Titanic*, April 1912," Gilder Lehrman Collection (GLC07640), accessed October 6, 2019.
<https://www.gilderlehrman.org/collection/glc07640?back=/mweb/search%3Fneedle%3Dglc07640%26fields%3Dall>.

After the 1912 sinking of the RMS *Titanic*, investigations and inquiries were created to learn why the "unsinkable" ship struck the iceberg and learn why many passengers and crew died in the first place. For investigators to learn what had happened onboard the *Titanic* that fateful night, primary sources from the survivors were necessary and they were analyzed for important information relating to the tragedy. One example of a primary source written by a *Titanic* survivor comes from the Gilder Lehrman Collection and it details how first-class passenger Dr. Washington Dodge and his family survived the tragedy. From Dodge's four-page handwritten account, historians and authors can learn about the state of mind of a first-class passenger during the *Titanic* sinking and the numerous issues a primary account can raise in regard to survivor testimony.

Before analyzing Dodge's primary source for information related to the *Titanic* disaster, a brief examination on the transcript is necessary to learn who wrote the account and what its purpose was. On the very first paragraph of the account, it reveals that Dr.

Washington Dodge was a first-class passenger travelling aboard the *Titanic* with his family (his wife Ruth and four-year-old son Washington Dodge Jr.) and that it was written inside the stationary room onboard the rescue ship *Carpathia* on the morning of April 15th, 1912. In addition to learning who Dodge was traveling with onboard the ship and where the primary source was written, historians and authors can use Dodge's descriptive observations to explore the immediate aftermath of the iceberg colliding with the *Titanic* (April 14th, 1912 at 11:45 pm)

to the *Carpathia* picking up the survivors. Although Dodge's account does help provide a chronological step-by-step account of the tragedy, there are numerous unanswered issues within the primary source such as what happened to the Dodge family onboard the *Carpathia* or who ordered Dodge to write down his testimony.

When historians and authors read Dodge's primary source on the *Titanic* disaster, they can learn about Dodge's frantic state of mind during the disaster. To start off his testimony, Dodge writes about being anxious the moment his family was being awoken by a "violent jar" and they joined a fellow group of concerned passengers on the promenade deck to learn what had happened. Although a deck officer attempted to reassure everyone that nothing was wrong (Dodge was very skeptical, but did not raise any objections), a steward ordered the Dodge family to put on their life preservers and immediately make their way to the lifeboat deck. Once the Dodge family reached the lifeboat deck at the middle of the second page, Dodge selfishly placed his family in Lifeboat Three before securing himself a spot in Lifeboat Fifteen (Dodge himself praises the crew for being "cool and masterful" during the crisis). Other than one instance in the third page where Dodge panics when two lifeboats being lowered into the water almost collide with one another, he surprisingly remained calm throughout the rest of his account and expressed relief when he sees the *Carpathia* approaching the survivors. Despite Dodge being in a wide range of emotions throughout his account of events, one main issue with the primary source is that Dodge does not go into detail into his reaction during major events such as when the *Titanic* sunk beneath the waves or when the *Carpathia* finally arrives to the rescue.

When historians and authors read Dodge's primary source on the *Titanic* disaster, they can analyze the primary account for issues relating to survivor testimony. While Dodge does not disclose the purpose for writing his account within the text, the fact that it was

written in the *Carpathia's* stationary room suggest that Dodge had to immediately jot down his story after being rescued and it raises more questions than answers about the primary source. Since Dodge's primary source provides no additional clues on the purpose or whom it was for (a *Carpathia* crew member would be the most rational guess), it raises concerns why a first-class passenger separated from his family was allowed to write down his testimony following a large-scale traumatic event. In the modern day, this would be the equivalent of a victim of a mass shooting being interviewed on CNN immediately following the event with no regard to the person's health. In addition to this issue, it also remains unclear what had happened to Dodge's account after the *Carpathia* docked in New York on April 18th, 1912 and ended up in the Gilder Lehrman Collection.

In his primary source written after the sinking of the *Titanic*, Washington Dodge shows how his family survived the tragedy along with a first-class passenger's state of mind during the disaster and the unanswered questions the primary account raises. Although Dodge's primary account provides a detailed chronological account of the *Titanic* sinking, it does not cover detail about the aftermath of the tragedy and raises such as the fate of the document after being completed or how Dodge and his family boarded the infamous vessel in the first place. Despite its shortcomings, the Dodge primary account can provide historians and authors a basic understanding on how a first-class passenger survived the *Titanic* and its immediate aftermath.

Honor Pledge

“I hereby declare upon my word of honor that I have neither given nor received unauthorized help on this work.”