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Admiralty laws, in effect at the time of *Titanic's* maiden voyage, did not require sailing vessels to have enough lifeboat-space available for every passenger and crew member. That means when *Titanic* sailed, she legally had insufficient lifeboats on board. This 1912 photo - by an uncredited photographer - depicts some of *Titanic's* surviving life boats. The image is maintained at the [State Library of Queensland](#) (in Brisbane, Australia).

The story of the lifeboat fiasco is well known. It wasn't just the lack of lifeboats (although the *Titanic* had more boats than contemporary laws required). The crew did not realize davits holding the boats in place were strong enough to bear the load of a full boat.

Had the crew conducted a drill, or had they known the facts, they could have saved many more lives. Unfortunately, many lifeboats were lowered to the sea with lots of open spaces.

Men were not allowed into the lifeboats until all women and children were safely aboard. One woman, Ida Straus, refused to leave without her husband. Archibald Gracie witnessed what happened:

Then I saw Mr. Straus and Mrs. Straus, of whom I had seen a great deal during the voyage. I had heard them discussing that if they were going to die they would die together. We tried to persuade Mrs. Straus to go alone, without her husband, and she said no. Then we wanted to make an exception of the husband, too, because he was an elderly man, and he said no, he would share his fate with the rest of the men, and that he would not go beyond. So I left them there.

What of the third-class passengers? Were they able to get into the lifeboats? Archibald Gracie has some chilling testimony about that:

Soon after that [he had helped lower a lifeboat] the water came up on the boat deck. We saw it and heard it...Mr. Smith [his friend Clint Smith]and myself thought then that there was no more chance for us there, there were so many people at that particular point, so we decided to go toward the stern, still on the starboard side, and as we were going toward the stern, to our surprise and consternation, up came from the decks below a mass of humanity, men and women - and we had thought that all the women were already loaded into the boats. The water was then right by us, and we tried to jump, Mr. Smith and myself did.

After he jumped into the water, holding his breath for as long as he could, Gracie surfaced.

When I came up to the surface there was no ship there. The ship would then have been behind me, and all around me was wreckage. I saw what seemed to be bodies all around.

Looking for a place of safety, he heard the sound of the *Titanic* being sucked under the sea as he saw drowning people all around:

There was a sort of gulp, as if something had occurred, behind me, and I suppose that was where the water was closing up, where the ship had gone down; but the surface of the water was perfectly still; and there were, I say, this wreckage and these bodies, and there were the horrible sounds of drowning people and people gasping for breath.

Seeing an upturned boat, with several crew members (including 2nd officer Lightoller) on it, Gracie swam toward safety. Others tried to get on the boat, weighting it down:

Our concern now was to get out of the wreckage and to get away from the swimmers in the water before they tried to get on the boat, and all of us would be lost. You do not want the details of that, nor the horrors of it!

Although accounts vary, about 1,491 people died that night when Titanic sank at 2:20 a.m. Captain Smith went down with the ship.

There were reports that one of the officers committed suicide. Rumors persist that it was First Officer Murdoch, although his colleagues absolutely denied that.

Some of the passengers went down with the ship too. Theirs would have been a fate worse than hypothermia.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/DOOMED-PASSENGERS-Fatal-Voyage-The-Titanic)

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Questions 2 Ponder

What Does It Mean to Say “We’re Only as Good as Our Weakest Link?”

Titanic's crew members, who were helping passengers escape the sinking ship, did not realize that davits holding the life boats in place were strong-enough to bear the weight of a fully loaded boat.

Explain how that lack of knowledge, which we could refer to as a “weak link,” may have cost more lives which could have been saved.

Does Love Always Conquer All?

Mr. and Mrs. Straus were wealthy people who owned Macy's Department Store, in New York City, but they chose to stay together knowing they would likely die when *Titanic* sank.

What is your assessment of the decisions the couple made which did, in fact, cause their deaths?

Media Stream



Ida Straus

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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Deep Inside the Titanic, Part 1

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