

# A QUIET SEA

## RMS TITANIC

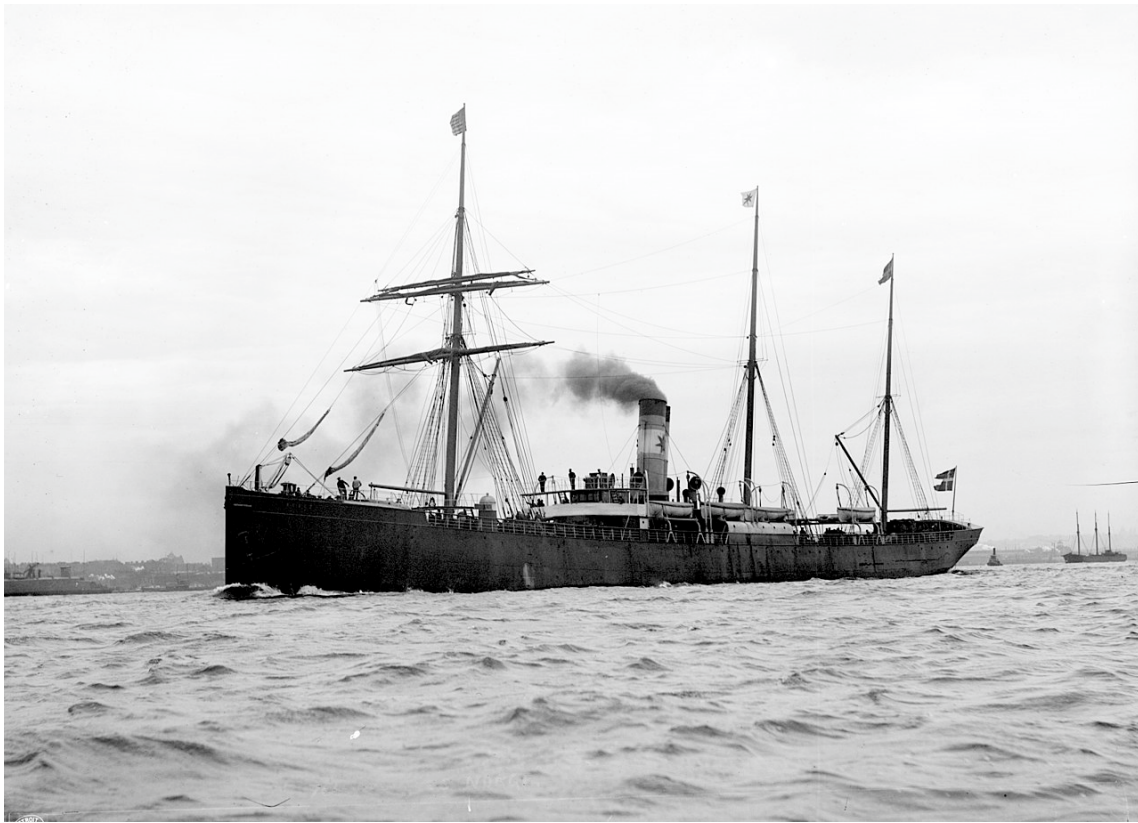


IMMIGRANTS, EXILES AND TYCOONS

# TITANIC: IMMIGRANTS, EXILES AND TYCOONS

## INTRODUCTION

Two hundred miles west of Scotland, a solitary granite and iron pinnacle rises more than 50 feet out of the sea. Rockall gets its name from Scottish Gallic with a Norse influence meaning “sea rock of roaring.” In 1904, the small Danish steamer SS Norge, built in 1881, left Copenhagen bound for New York City carrying over 700 passengers. More than half were mothers and children. When, in dense fog, she went aground near Rockall, Captain Gundal reversed the engines and pried his ship free, only to have her rapidly flood. Just five of her eight lifeboats got away before the ship sank 12 minutes later. The boats were found 8 days later with about 130 survivors. Among those who perished were nearly 250 Russian Jews fleeing the Czar’s pogroms. It was the worst loss of life in the North Atlantic until Titanic, 8 years later.



SS Norge  
Credit: Wikipedia

## FLIGHT

The North Atlantic steamship service was an escape route to the New World for those wanting to break free from their economic and political troubles or flee sectarian violence, discrimination and hate. Generations of Jews, Muslims, Slavs and others left their homes to gain basic rights and earn a living. Many met with suspicion or indifference in America, suffering prejudice, exploitation, and poverty. Still, the torch of Liberty Enlightening the World offered hope that their struggles were worth it.



## IMMIGRANTS & EXILES

In the late 1700s, Russia expanded into territories with considerable Jewish populations. In portions of conquered Poland, Jews were pushed out of their homes and forced to live in confined areas, while in southern and western Russia, Jews were sent to segregated areas known as the Pale of the Settlement. Pogroms began in the early 1800s and continued into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Riots were incited and used as excuses to kill and banish Jews. The Kishinev pogrom in 1903 murdered and wounded hundreds, destroyed over 700 homes and sacked scores of Jewish businesses.



Kishinev pogrom  
Credit: ASAP History

There were 600 pogroms in the 3 years following the Kishinev carnage. Eventually, armed Jews fought back, temporarily halting the systematic killing. Still, nearly 250,000 Jews were killed and tens of thousands made homeless. International condemnation did little to stop the purges. The wave of migration of over 2 million Jews from Eastern Europe to America began.

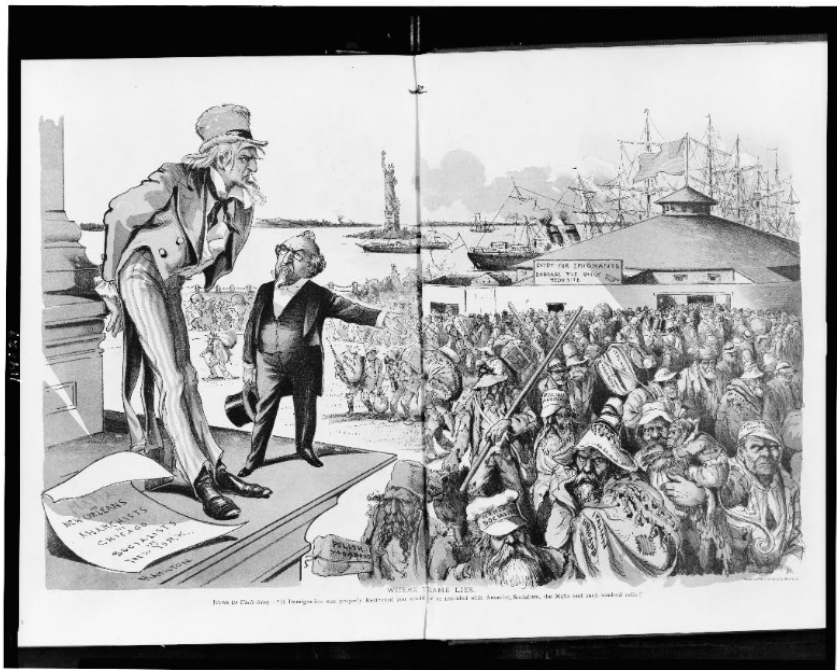


Theodore Roosevelt to the Czar- "Now that you have peace without, why not remove this burden and have peace within your borders."

Credit: Wiki Commons



Of course, America had its own xenophobes. Jewish newcomers were routinely associated with socialism, communism, intellectualism and greed. Yet despite discrimination and prejudice, they persevered and created opportunities to advance professionally and further diversify the middle class in the United States.



Where the blame lies  
Credit: Library of Congress

Muslims also sought refuge in the United States. Religious wars during the Crusades (in which Muslim and Jew alike were killed or forced to convert to Christianity) were followed by purges in southern Italy, where some were expelled to Albania. Mongol invasions continued the slaughter. Libraries containing accumulated cultural and scientific knowledge were destroyed. The killings continued into the 1700s, with the Sikh killing thousands, usually by burning alive. Many women were separated from their families and forced to convert to Sikhism.



Expulsion of the Moriscos (Muslims who were converted to Christianity) from Valencia by Vincente Mostre  
Credit: Wikipedia

The first Muslims to land in North America were caught up in the slave trade and arrived even before the colonies were established. Many of the enslaved who practiced Islam submitted to

Christianity, although some continued to worship in secret. Some slaves with dual (anglicized) names fought in the American Revolution. Among those who came from educated Muslim families was Mamadou Yarrow, born in West Africa in 1836. Purchased by a plantation owner in Maryland, Yarrow became his owner's manservant and was hired out for wages. Allowed to keep a portion of his earnings, after 44 years he was able to buy his and his son's freedom. Yarrow became prosperous and died at the age of 86. He held to his Muslim faith and was buried in the garden where he prayed.



Mamadou Yarrow by Charles Wilson Peale 1819

Credit: Wikipedia

By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Muslim migration out of Western Asia began in earnest. Many fled the practice of slavery in the Ottoman Empire (Bosnia in Southeast Europe, Lebanon and Syria, which was partially autonomous at the time). Twice in 13 years, Muslims in Azerbaijan were killed by Armenian Bolsheviks. Then, the Armenians suffered their own near genocide in 1912 at the hands of Turkey. They endured economic hardships, religious intolerance and conscription into various militaries. By the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, more than half the Muslims in the United States lived in New York and New Jersey. They initially established themselves as peddlers but expanded into the garment industry, opened grocery stores and worked in the construction industry.

## TITANIC

### STEERAGE PASSENGERS

About 15 million immigrants arrived in the United States in the first 15 years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as many as had arrived in the 40 years between 1860 and 1900. Many of those seeking a new life traveled on the premier ships of the transatlantic ferry service. Immigrants were impressed by the number of funnels that a steamship had; a liner with four stacks was a ship worth traveling on.

On Titanic, as on other ships, passengers were separated by class. Third-Class passengers had the least expensive accommodations. The term steerage comes from berthing immigrants on sailing vessels in the lower decks and with cargo. Of the 1,317 passengers on Titanic's maiden

voyage, 709 were in Third Class, many in two- or four-berth cabins. White Star was justly proud of their new, well-ventilated accommodations, which were much better than those in their competitors' ships. Hungarian and immigrant advocate Edward Steiner wrote of conditions in 1906, "900 steerage passengers [are] crowded into the hold of ... the (German liner) *Kaiser Wilhelm II*, of the North German Lloyd line. They are positively packed like cattle, making a walk on deck when the weather is good, absolutely impossible, while to breathe clean air below in rough weather, when the hatches are down is an equal impossibility. The stench becomes unbearable... and the division between the sexes is not carefully looked after, and the young women who are quartered among the married passengers have neither the privacy to which they are entitled nor are they much more protected than if they were living promiscuously. The food, which is miserable, is dealt out of huge kettles into the dinner pails provided by the steamship company."<sup>1</sup>

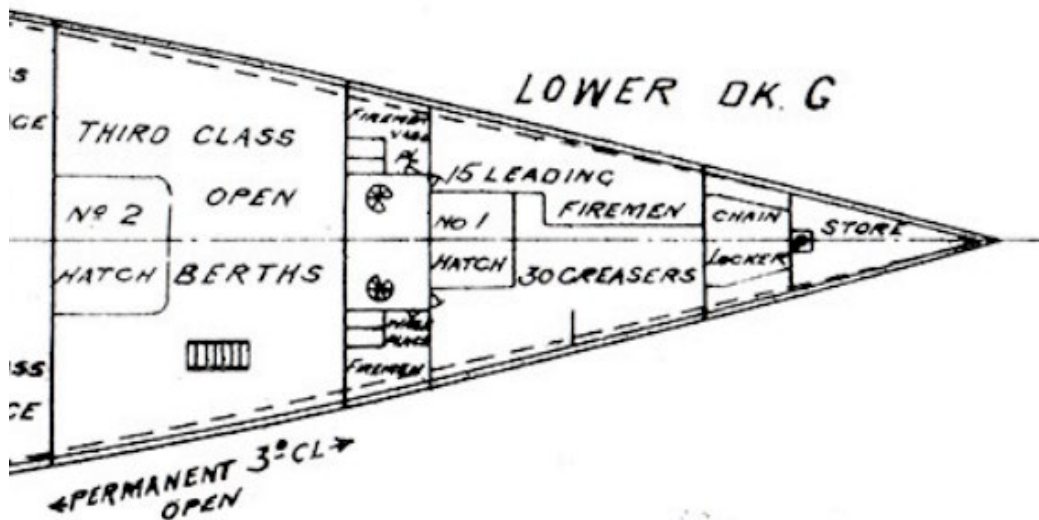
The semi-private cabins in White Star ships proved popular, and the line was recognized for its progressive berthing facilities. Carpets, curtains and other soft furnishings were limited, as they could harbor fleas and lice. White Star constantly inspected and cleaned its ships. It was in the company's interest to detect diseases and infestation and ensure that passengers could stay in New York, as those who failed the health inspection were returned to their point of departure at the company's expense.



Four-berth Third Class cabin  
Credit: Wiki Commons

Third-Class berthing spaces occupied the four lower decks and were located in the bow and stern. Open-air spaces were fore and aft in the well decks and raised quarterdeck in the stern. Families were kept together, while single men were accommodated forward and single women aft. Catherine Wallis, the Third-Class matron, watched for any evidence of mischief. The least expensive steerage space (\$35 for a one-way ticket, about a penny a mile) was furthest forward and lowest in the hull, about 100 feet aft of the bow on Deck G, in way of the waterline. This was an open berthing space for men traveling alone or in groups. (Those in this forward berthing area experienced the collision as a tremendous crash, and water soon filled the space.)

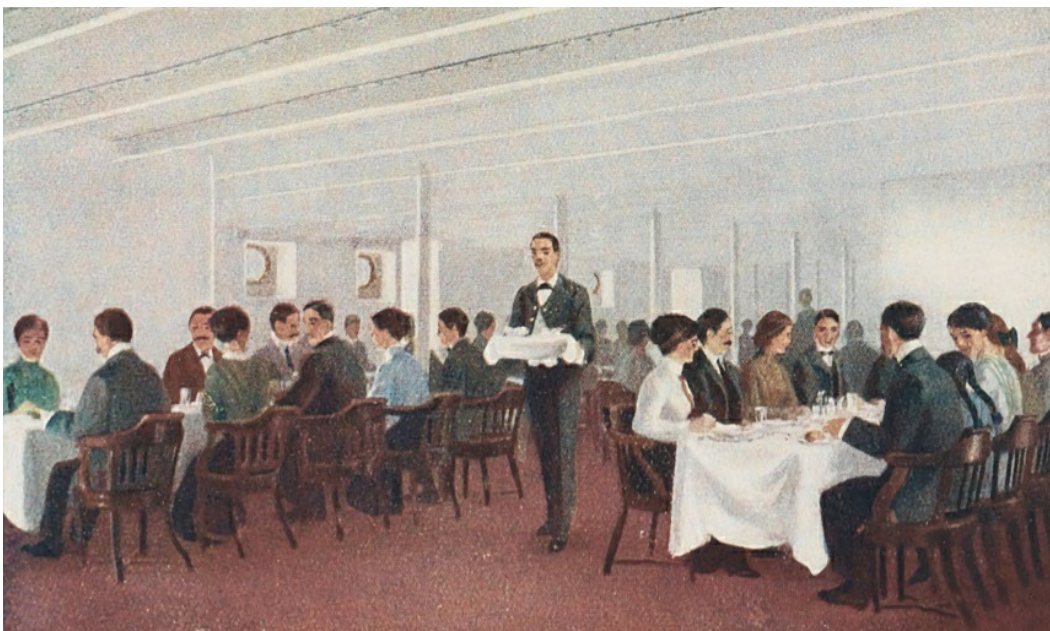




Third Class Open Berths, bow of sister ship Olympic  
Credit: The Shipbuilder 1911

There was considerable diversity in Third Class. About 30 nationalities were represented, with 60% migrating from the United Kingdom and Scandinavia. The remainder, considered “new” immigrants, were from Southern and Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Russia, with a smattering of Syrians, Lebanese and Bulgarians. Others were joining relatives already in the United States. The only Asians on board were eight Chinese stokers bound for another ship in New York. In contrast, more than 80% of those in First and Second Class were British, Canadian and American, many returning from vacations in Europe.

With the introduction of the three Olympic class liners carrying large numbers of immigrants, White Star offered meals that were familiar to their largest and most profitable group of customers. Beginning around 1906, White Star began providing kosher meals. Brochures describing the bill of fare stated, “Kosher Meat supplied and Cooked for Jewish Passengers as desired.” Proper preparation methods were approved by a rabbi. A kosher chef from South Africa, Charles Kennell, prepared meals in a separate kitchen. Jewish passengers in Third Class also had their own wait stewards in their dining room.



Third-Class dining room  
Credit: wiki commons

## SECOND CLASS PASSENGERS

Although it is often thought that immigrants traveled only in Third Class, a varied group traveled Second Class: clergy relocating to American parishes, teachers, writers, families, widows joining relatives already in America, newlyweds attracted by life in the United States. Most were of English, Scottish or American descent. They were well looked after. They had their own lounge, library, smoking room, dining rooms and generous open-air promenade areas. A barber shop was available and doubled as a souvenir shop. Second-Class passengers had two elaborate stairway entrances and their own elevator.



Second-Class smoking room  
Credit: Wikipedia



Second-Class library  
Credit: Wikipedia

Public rooms were tastefully paneled with carved sycamore and oak. Second-Class compartments on the Olympic class ships were considered equal to First Class on some other liners of the day.



Second-Class cabin (Olympic)  
Credit: Wiki commons



Second-Class accommodations and public rooms on Titanic were just aft of midships and occupied seven decks. Harland & Wolff employees who were members of the Guarantee group (to keep an eye on Titanic's performance) were housed in either First or Second Class, as were the eight musicians and two wireless operators. The sole black face on board Titanic was Haitian engineer Joseph Laroche, who perished in the disaster. He was traveling in Second Class with his pregnant French wife and two daughters. They were returning to Haiti, where they wanted their third child to be born.



The Laroche family  
Credit: Wiki Commons

## TYCOONS

The Edwardian elite and their American cousins were a closely knit band of wealth and privilege. Since they encountered each other at various events and exotic locales, bumping into each other on the maiden voyage of the largest ship afloat wasn't a surprise. Some were the focus of scandal. John Jacob Astor IV, traveling with his young pregnant bride (she was 18, he was 47), had left his wife in a very public breakup and was the talk of the town and Titanic.



Madeline and John Astor IV  
Credit: Vintage News



Astor mansion on Fifth Avenue  
Credit: Lawrance Architectural Presentations

First-Class male passengers who escaped the sinking with their wives and property were excoriated. Henry Sleeper Harper, who had survived another sinking in 1883, boarded Boat #3 and was saved along with his wife Myra, their Pekinese, Sun Yat Sen, and dragoman (interpreter) Hammad Hassab, who had been purchased in Egypt.



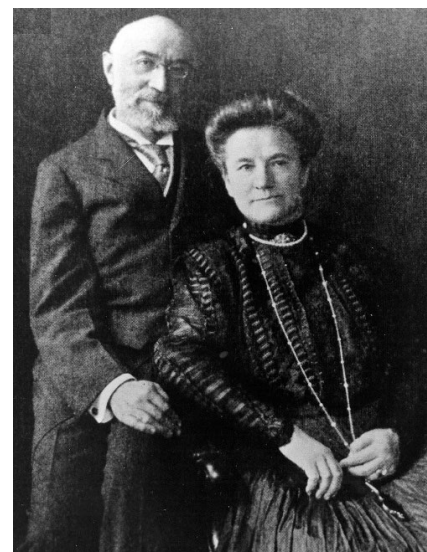
Hammad Hassab  
Credit: Encyclopedia Titanica

Cosmo Duff-Gordon managed to get into Boat #1 with his wife and secretary. Aware that the crew's wages stopped when Titanic sank, Duff-Gordon offered to replace their lost possessions. Because Boat #1 didn't return to save any victims in the water, it appeared to some that he was bribing the crew not to row back. A group photo after the disaster of the Duff-Gordons and the boat crew only added to the image of a payoff. However, such claims were unfounded.

Conversely, other wealthy passengers were lauded for their courage. Benjamin Guggenheim and his valet dressed like gentlemen to meet their death. Isidor and Ida Straus, co-founders of Macy's, perished together after he refused to enter a boat, and she refused to leave him. John Jacob Astor IV stayed on board after escorting his young wife into a boat. Martin Rothschild, of the banking family, placed his wife Elizabeth in a lifeboat and stepped back. First-Class passengers who behaved in this manner became legendary. Even so, it could not be reconciled that children in Third Class were more likely than men in First Class to perish.



Benjamin Guggenheim  
Credit: Wiki Commons



Isidor and Ida Straus  
Credit: Wikipedia



## CLASS DISTINCTIONS & SURVIVAL

Lifeboat assignments were ill-defined. Theoretically, it was women and children first, followed by the men of First, Second and Third Class, then the crew. In practice, there was no system. Because liners were not required to carry boats for all, organization was nil, and Third Class was mostly left on its own. The three passenger classes were separated by gates, primarily to keep immigrants, who may have illnesses, from contaminating the other classes. Second Class was also kept away from First Class, more to insure the latter's privacy, commensurate with their higher ticket prices.

This class system was unquestioned, and few Third-Class survivors were interviewed during the American and British inquiries that followed. An overwhelming number of passenger witnesses were selected from First Class; their well-spoken testimonies were more dramatic, even with numerous unsubstantiated quotes. The British Inquiry concluded that there was no discrimination regarding lifeboat access. But Third-Class men, women and children, unfamiliar with the huge ship, frightened and facing language barriers, wandered about the ship with their luggage, looking for a way out. Several heroic stewards opened the gates and guided women and children to the boat deck, but many of the men were kept below until most of the boats were gone. As many as 75% of Third-Class passengers died on Titanic. Entire Third-Class families were lost: eight members of the Goodwin family, 11 members of the Sage family and seven members of the Andersson family. Stella, a daughter in the Sage family, reached a lifeboat, but returned to her family when they couldn't board the boat.



The Goodwin family (19-month Sydney, also lost, is not shown)  
Credit: Wikipedia

## EPILOGUE

Third-Class passenger Hinnah Touma, born in the village of Tibnin, Lebanon, in 1885, held a slip of paper with Dowagiac, Michigan, written on it. It was from her brother-in-law Abraham, who with her husband Darwis, had lived in the small Michigan town since 1905. Darwis and Abraham worked on a farm and were saving to buy land. Darwis planned for Hinnah and their two children, son Jirjis, 6, and daughter Mariyam, 10, to leave Lebanon and join him. Saving enough money to secure passage for his family was difficult, as most of his wages were sent home to support his family. Abraham, on the other hand, was single and able to save his earnings. Concocting a plan to surprise his brother, Abraham secretly sent Hinnah money for passage to America.

In February 1912, Hinnah, her two children and other Lebanese bound for America left their small village and traveled by caravan for 100 miles to Beirut to catch a freighter bound for Marseilles.

The food was poor and the quarters cramped. They arrived safely and embarked on a 3-day train trip to Cherbourg, where they waited in a hotel before boarding RMS Titanic. Once on board, Hinnah's children loved exploring the great ship, and Mariyam found a vacant cabin to sleep in. While waiting one night for Mariyam's return, the shock of the collision slammed the cabin door on Hinnah's hand. She got bandaged in the infirmary on D-deck, and returned to learn from the other Lebanese passengers that Titanic had hit an iceberg. It was suggested that she return to her cabin and pray.

Not one to be told what to do, Hinnah gathered up her son and trooped to the boat deck, instructing him to wait near a lifeboat. While searching below for Mariyam, they stumbled into each other and returned to their cabin to collect money, warm clothes and the valuable piece of paper. On their way back to the boat deck, they grabbed lifejackets and found Jirjis where Hinnah had left him. Although urged by other passengers to enter a boat, he refused, saying he had to wait for his mother and sister. Nearing 2 am, the three entered Collapsible C (a lifeboat with portable canvas sides), forward on the starboard side. Officers Wilde and Murdoch loaded and launched the lifeboat, while Purser McElroy fired shots to drive back panicked men rushing the boat. The boat bumped down the ship's side into the water. Shortly thereafter, Titanic broke apart, reared her stern in the air and vanished. Hinnah covered her son's head with her cloak to keep him from hearing the cries of those dying in the sea. Hers was the last boat successfully launched on the starboard side. Hinnah called out for her Lebanese companions and heard nothing.

In Michigan, Abraham learned of the sinking first and was distraught; how could he tell Darwis that the loss of his family was his fault? Revealing the awful news, the devastated brothers mourned the loss of Hinnah, Jirjis and Mariyam. But Hinnah and her children were alive, rescued by Carpathia and assisted by St. Vincent's Hospital in New York. Five days after the sinking, the brothers received a telegram from an Arabic-speaking priest in New York. Hinnah's precious piece of paper was the vehicle through which the telegram was sent. At the family reunion, Hinnah was elated to see Fatima Musselman, the only other survivor from the group that had left Hinnah's village for America.



Hannih & Darwis Touma reunited  
Credit: Encyclopedia Titanica

Sources: Forward (Jewish Independent non-profit); Titanic and the Jews; Swan Library Services; Reuters (J. P. Morgan conspiracy); Insider (Rothschild conspiracy); History; The Rothschild Archive; Museum of the Jewish People; Muslim Persecution (Wikipedia); The Arab American; Titanic Demographics (John Henderson); The Conversation (Anti-Semitism); Quora (Levant peoples); Queens Gazette; Titanic Belfast; Lazarus & Sarah Straus Family; Slavs and Anti-Slavic Sentiment, Slavic migration to the Balkans (Wikipedia); Bloomsbury Collections on Slavic prejudice; The Slovak Press; Dorothy Parker Society; Middle East Monitor; Encyclopedia Titanica; Historiography of the Soviet Union Wikipedia; Genealogy Bank; On the Trail of the Immigrant by Edward Steiner; The Reagan Library Blog; History on the Net; Signature (Second Class Passengers); A Night to Remember, by Walter Lord; Research Maritime History No. 31 (The Rescue of the Third Class on the Titanic); Shipbuilder, 1911 Special Edition

In remembrance of my grandparents