

## **Physicist Activist: Dr. Elmer Imes and the Civil Rights Case of Juliette Derricotte**

Primary Source  
Letter from Elmer S. Imes to Leslie Blanchard,  
November 9, 1931

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Description:

This letter concerns the death of Juliette Derricotte and discusses their treatment following a car accident which took place on November 7, 1931. Miss Leslie Blanchard was the executive secretary of the Young Women's Christian Association (Y.W.C.A.).

[enclosure]

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November 9, 1931

Miss Leslie Blanchard  
National Y W C A  
600 Lexington Avenue  
New York, New York

My dear Miss Blanchard:

I telegraphed you this forenoon indicating that I am not entirely satisfied with the version of the accident story which I gave you yesterday.

11-27-51  
There is enough difference of estimate and opinion on the part of the two survivors of the wreck to make it painfully evident that this case is no exception to the general rule, that the truth is hard to arrive at even from absolutely honest observers.

I think I told you enough yesterday to lead you to realize that my chief concern in going down was to do whatever was possible to be done for the injured and that of necessity I could not have made a careful or reliable investigation as to actual conditions.

On one hand we have a flat statement of a Negro physician who went down from Chattanooga, that there was no hospital in Dalton. Those of us who went down from here arrived in Dalton about 2:00 A. M. and were directed to the home of Mrs Alice E Wilson, where it was told us the party had been taken. We found that an hour before our arrival they had been removed to Chattanooga because nothing could be done for them in Dalton.

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Mrs Wilson stated to me that her house was used for colored people who needed hospital care and that the white physicians who operated on colored patients used a room in her house - the inference being that they could not be taken to a hospital. The house was in very bad order and there was no evidence of facilities for handling such cases as this there. The bed which Mrs Wilson vacated to answer our knock was the bed in which Miss Derricotte or Miss Johnson had lain for five or six hours. It was a very uncomfortable looking and not very clean folding bed. She explained that the room that was ordinarily used for hospital purposes was temporarily in use by a couple.

As I telegraphed, Dr Jones is in Dalton investigating. It is my opinion that Dr Jones is perhaps too inclined to making favorable deductions to allow his version to be final. I am not intending to say by inference or otherwise that there would

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Miss Blanchard - 2

be anything dishonest in his report but I do believe that in some matters he is an incurable optimist and since we wish the absolute truth in this matter I am strongly of the opinion that an unbiased, impartial investigation should be made.

I understand that you are to have a talk with Mrs Gilbert to-night. I know that she will be prepared to give you whatever we have of facts and will indicate to you absolutely what so far is a matter merely of opinion.

11-27-52  
It would seem to me that the whole matter hinges on whether or not there is a hospital in Dalton and whether or not these people could have been taken there. Even if we find that they could have been, the fact remains that they were not - because they were colored and because the usual assumption in such a case is that colored patients are not accepted. In any event I am very sure that an investigation by your organization is warranted and whatever can be done to stir up opinion that will better conditions and understandings ought be done. It seems that whatever may have been the condition at Dalton there are hundreds of communities throughout the south in which as fine and important a person as Miss Derricotte would have been allowed to die, either because she was denied admission to the hospital or because it was assumed that she could not be admitted.

I am very glad that you are taking the position that you are taking in this matter, and I am very grateful.

Sincerely yours,

(Signed) Elmer S Imes

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