

# THE WORKS OF FRANCIS J. GRIMKÉ

*Edited by*

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**Letters**

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*Matthew Anderson to Francis J. Grimké*

Canal Zone, September 7, 1921.

My dear Grimké:

We leave the Canal Zone tomorrow on the S. S. Santa Marta for the Republic of Colombia, S. A., where we cruise along stopping at its main cities for a week, then we will leave for New York, reaching there on the 22nd, when we go immediately to Philadelphia and launch out into the depths of the work there waiting for us.

As stated in my last letter, we landed at Cristobal on the Canal Zone the 24th, coming immediately by train to Paraiso, the home of Helen and her husband. Their Clubhouse is on the very brink of the Canal, and only 1 mile from the Pedro Miguel Locks. Great ships from all over the world pass and repass from the Atlantic to the Pacific and vice versa, nearly every hour. Last week the dreadnaught Pennsylvania, loaded with 400 marines passed the veranda where I am now dictating this letter to Blanche, and launched in the Pacific opposite Panama City with her great guns trained upon the city, should there be the least uprising on the part of the Panamians. You know all about the decision of a tract of land which the Costa Ricans claimed from the Panamians according to the decision of Chief Justice White of U. S. The Panamians have been exceedingly sore ever since the decision and they hate the United States with an inveterate hatred. Monday of this week was Labor Day on the Zone, but the Panamians to get equal with the U. S. declared a day of mourning and that not a vehicle should come into the city. Several letters passed between Governor Morrow of the Zone and President Porras of Panama, but the President stood firm and as a result there was no holiday, whatever, in Panama, even the jitneys were stopped outside the city limits.

According to intention, I at once started a private investigation of the segregation of the colored people here on the Zone. I have just finished my report and herewith enclose a copy of the same. Everything contained in the report is absolutely true and bears out the testimonies as received in the STATES before we came here.

By appointment, I had an hour's interview with Governor Morrow and took up each one of the points of segregation, but he, of course, tried to justify each prevailing condition. I feel that

my work has been most timely and I feel sure it will be effective in improving conditions here. The Governor was very careful not to commit himself, but I had him so completely tangled up that he seemed much embarrassed.

On Monday at 3 I had a private interview with President Porras of Panama for about a half hour. If I had been able to speak Spanish, he would have entertained us longer. He can speak English, but very poorly. He expressed pleasure in meeting me and requested that I should write him.

We have had two weeks of unbounded pleasure here on the Zone and in Panama. The Panamians are very pleasant people and are anxious to have visitors enjoy themselves.

Mr. and Mrs. Waller are doing finely, Waller having the confidence and respect of the community. A large passenger steamer is now passing the porch, the decks just crowded, it is every bit of 500 ft. long, floating the British flag. I am sure you would enjoy a couple of weeks here. Mr. Waller's quarters are spacious and airy.

I trust you, your brother and Nana are all well. Blanche joins me in kindest regards to you all. Read the letter to Archie, also the report.

Yours sincerely,  
Matthew Anderson.

P. S. Mr. Waller and wife both send kind remembrances.

*A Private Investigation of Prevalent Conditions on the  
Panama Canal Zone*

For sometime my attention has been called, both by the public press and from private sources to the discriminating features to which the colored employees of the Canal Zone are being subjected, so that I finally decided to assume, personally, the time and expense of a visit to the Zone for the purpose of a personal investigation of these charges.

I arrived at the Zone after a delightful sail, on the 24th of August and commenced my investigations at once. Without making any public announcement of the object of my visit, proceeded at once, almost incognito, and made a number of trips the length of the Zone, interviewing scores on the subject in question, official

and laymen, colored and white, so that I feel prepared to make the following statements of fact:

It might be explained at the off-set, that employees on the Zone are classified as Gold and Silver: Gold meaning all Americans; Silver, all not Americans, technically speaking, with but some very few exceptions.

First: As above stated, employees on the Canal Zone are divided into two classes,—namely, Gold and Silver. The Commissaries, places managed by the government for the sale of food-stuffs and clothing,—are likewise classified. Silver employees are forbidden to make purchases in a Gold Commissary, but Gold Employees are permitted to purchase in both Gold or Silver Commissaries. Servants of Gold Employees, usually colored, are permitted to make purchases in Gold Commissaries only for their employers, but they are segregated even for this, to a small space and are served without any contact with the article to be purchased, it being handed to them from the various departments of the store by the clerk in charge. It is also a known fact that the Silver Commissaries are the recipients of all unsold stock of the Gold Commissaries, and at all times, the inferior grade of anything is placed in the Silver Commissary, but the Silver Employee, the patron, largely, of the Silver Commissary, is asked the very identical price that is asked of the Gold Employee for the fresh and better grade of provisions, as allotted to the Gold Commissary.

Second: The towns and living quarters are also classified as Gold and Silver, inhabited and used, naturally, by Gold and Silver employees. Usually a town is strictly Gold or strictly Silver; each Gold town having an adjoining Silver town, each Gold town showing marked favoritism in point of quarters, up-keep and general appearance. Quarters are usually frame, built two stories high, cottage style, surrounding open veranda, screened and well ventilated, grass plots, the dimensions of the cottages being 72x45, intended for the use of four families in a Gold town, and without rent,—but a building of the same dimensions in a Silver town is intended for twelve families, and then it is at times without any plumbing, and if any plumbing, it is totally inadequate. These quarters are leased to the Silver employees at the rate of \$5.00 per family, per month, payable always in advance, netting \$60.00 monthly. In a Gold town the grass plots and roads are kept in excellent condition, whereas, with the exception of a few Silver towns, very little atten-

tion is given to the appearance of the grass and condition of road-ways.

Third: As to wages, the same discrimination appears. A Gold employee is paid from \$1.00 to \$1.50 per hour, pays nothing for transit to and from work. A Silver employee in some instances doing the self same work is paid but 25cts to 50cts an hour, he is allowed no holidays except those purely legal, and in many cases must pay for his own transit to and from work. If Gold and Silver employees are detailed to do work at a distance, the Gold employee is paid for his time in transit, while the Silver employee is not allowed anything in transit.

Fourth: The United States Post Offices do not escape the same system of discrimination, as there is not a Post Office on the Zone from Cristobal on the Atlantic end to Balboa Heights on the Pacific end, a distance of fifty miles, where a Silver employee can purchase a stamp on the same side where the Gold employee makes his purchase. This is rigidly enforced in all the Post Offices on the Canal Zone.

Fifth: There are also established ten Y. M. C. A.'s by the Government, which since the recent War were converted into Community Clubhouses, five Gold and five Silver. The salaries received by the Gold Secretaries is from \$200 to \$250 per month, whereas the salaries received by the Silver Secretaries is from \$112.50 to \$150 per month, and this notwithstanding that the Gold Clubhouse rarely shows a balance at the end of the month, and if put to the test, it is believed that any of the Silver Clubhouses could be self-supporting. The Gold Clubhouses are, however, equipped far better than the Silver Clubhouses, having paid assistants, physical directors, swimming pools, popular and up-to-date libraries, etc., although the masses of people are assigned to the Silver Clubhouses, because they are Silver employees, which group analyzed may be West Indian, Panaminian, who are both colored and white, and other white and colored people not classified as Gold employees, which group is naturally in the majority of the Gold group.

Sixth: The same discrimination is prevalent in regard to the schools of the Gold and Silver towns. The Gold towns have well regulated schools, carrying a child from the lowest through the high school grades, while the schools provided for Silver employees' children are limited to 8th grade education. A father who has a

bright and ambitious son (Silver employee) complained to me that he had been compelled to have his son take the 8th grade work over for three consecutive years, rather than leave him to run idle in the streets. Just while I am writing, a girl of teen age came in, and when I asked if she were going to school, her reply was that she had taken all that she could get in the 8th grade work. Aside from the need that this very great discrimination in education between these two classes be obliterated, there is a burning need for a good vocational, and academic institution for Silver towns, patterned after the best institutions of this kind in the States.

It might be added in plainer description of the classification of the two groups of Employees and Towns, that the terms Gold and Silver are frequently interchanged for simpler words, namely, "White and Colored" respectively, giving the casual observer a keener insight into the real meaning of Gold and Silver. This is emphasized also in cases of white or fair enough Silver employees partaking of all Gold privileges possible, such as Post Office accommodations, Commissary accommodations, where, if their complexion warrants, no question is asked as to what group they belong, many times, however, the person is a Silver Employee, and should be rated as such in all matters.

Another interesting feature is that technically speaking Colored Americans are Gold Employees, by virtue of the fact that they are Americans; but this privilege is infringed upon in many instances, and even the Secretaries of the Silver Club-houses, who are Colored Americans, and Gold Employees, have had the basest kind of discrimination waged against them in the Commissaries, Post Offices, living quarters, etc. and every inch of rightful privilege, that they had now accorded, is given after the very bitterest contest for the same.

One other fact regarding the wages of the Silver Employees, which, aside from being at the lowest, has suffered a severe reduction from what was beggarly wage before the strike of 1920, to less than that now.

In conclusion permit me to say that while the United States government has reason to be proud of its matchless achievement at the Isthmus of Panama, an achievement which is recognized the world over as one of the great, if not the greatest wonder of the age, she is making, I fear, a most prodigious blunder in her dis-

criminations against her colored employees on the Zone. It is, indeed, a serious question, if the wrong done these people will not do more to blacken the nation's character than her gigantic achievement at the Zone will give lustre to her name, especially in the estimation of the Latin Republics which stand observing at her door, and other observing nations across the sea, which are watching her with not too friendly an eye. For the principle laid down by one of America's greatest statesman, was—"Only that State can live, in which injury to the least member is recognized as done to the whole,"—which principle is sound, and its evil will surely be wreaked upon that nation which fails to heed its warning.

While the Panama Canal is the greatest wonder of the age, it cannot be taken in at one glance. Its vastness grows upon one. When the careless observer views the Canal for the first time, he is disposed to say, not audibly, however, "This is no great achievement. It is certainly no greater than hundreds of achievements of the United States and other countries." But, let him take a closer vision, including the Culebra Cut, which was literally made by picking out that portion of the mountain that fit the cut, and casting it into the sea; also Gatun Lake, artificially made as an emergency supply for the Canal, and which covers one hundred and sixty four square miles and is of sufficient depth to bear up the largest steamers afloat; nor has he meditated upon the magnitude of the great locks at Gatun, Pedro Miguel and Miraflores. His vision must also grasp the condition of the district of country through which the canal passes, before a pick or shovel was used to change it. He would realize that the whole distance of fifty miles was reeking with deadly disease and that annually, hundreds were cut down by the Grim Reaper, Death. He would see along the course of the proposed Canal from Cristobal to Balboa Heights, wretched hovels, the huts of the laborers brought from France to do the work of excavation,—most of these brave souls sick, some dying, others being born in solemn procession to the grave. Steadying his vision, he gets another sight, one that fills him with rapture and delight,—for behold, like a miracle, the poisonous miasma of the valley has been lifted, the cause of the deadly condition prevalent on the Zone is destroyed; the humble shacks of the French, which were an eye-sore, have been removed, and in their stead, lovely villages, towns, attractive military and naval bases, fine homes of both civil and military employees on the Zone are erected,



and one would seldom see, must less feel the sting of a single mœquito or any pesting insect, so completely have they been exterminated from the Zone,—such is a vision of the Panama Canal Zone today. Such is the Herculean achievement of the Americans, such is the height, the depth, the breadth and length of the greatest wonder of the Age.

No American citizen comprehends the gigantic extent of this achievement but what he has a feeling of pride that he is an American and that the Stars and Stripes are his flag. If he stops here, if he keeps his eye riveted upon this glorious and other glorious achievements of his country, he will vow eternal allegiance to her honor and be ready to die for her cause. But when he sees this same country stooping to insult his manhood, by denying him the rights and privileges which belong to him by virtue of his being an American citizen, and which are denied simply because he is a Negro, if it were not for his faith in God, the Almighty Ruler of this vast universe, Who is no respecter of person, he would at once renounce his allegiance to his country and to his country's flag, but he has faith that

“Behind the dim unknown  
Standeth God, within the shadow  
Keeping watch above His own.”

He believes that at no distant future, the American nation will come to a realization of the fact that no group of her citizens are more loyal nor are there any doing more to develop her resources, than this same Negro, and when she comes to see this she will accord to him his every right and the dastardly discriminations and cruel treatment to the Negro will come to a sudden and rightful end.

*Matthew Anderson to Francis J. Grimké*

United Fruit Company, Steamship Service, Sept. 15th, 1921.

Dear Grimké & Friends:

Lest I may forget, I will try and sketch something of my experience since I last wrote, which was at the Canal Zone in Panama. We left the Zone on the 8th inst. for Cartagena, Colombia where we arrived the morning of the 9th. The city lies off from the landing quite 1½ miles. It has a population of 60,000. The city is a very old Spanish City, having many very old histori-