

Less than a decade ago, a governor of the state of Florida stated unequivocally that no Negro was worth a salary of \$4000 annually. This statement was made when a proposal was placed before the State Legislature advocating an increase in the stipend of the late Dr. J. R. E. Lee, who pioneered in higher education of Negroes at the Florida Agricultural and Mechanical College, the state-supported institution for Negroes of which he was president for twenty years. On February 19th of this year upon request of Brother William H. Gray, Jr., thirty-four year old recently appointed president of the college, Governor Millard Caldwell and his cabinet provided one-half million dollars for the institution.

Brother William H. Gray, Jr., regional Vice-President of Alpha Phi Alpha and a Ph. D. from the University of Pennsylvania, was elected president of the college in July, 1944, at the age of thirty-two, after an unusually successful three year tenure as president of a small Negro Baptist college in Florida. The one-half million dollars made available in February brought to a total over one million dollars appropriated to the college since October, 1944 under Brother Gray's leadership. Last year, the state legislature approved a sixty-seven percent increase in appropriations for the institution, and in October of 1945, Brother Gray inaugurated an out-of-state scholarship program with state-provided funds for the benefit of Negro students desiring courses not offered at the Florida Agricultural and Mechanical College.

Far more profound than the apparent benefits to Negro education in Florida represented by this newly vitalized interest in a minority group is the fact that Brother Gray's ability to stimulate this interest is directly attributed to the growing awareness among leaders of both races

that mutual respect and cooperation may exist without erupting existing mores. Providing direction among his group to changes in attitude reflected in the thinking of such men as former Governor Spessard Holland (during whose administration, Dr. Gray was elected), present Governor Millard Caldwell and Senator Claude Pepper, Brother Gray insistently advocates that no compulsion exists for the southern Negro to remain despicable subservient, nor is there justification for his being radically belligerent. He maintains that a racial philosophy sustaining the distinct identity, yet permitting an approach based upon courteous understanding will alleviate much of the racial animosity presently existing in the South.

Brother Gray's almost meteoric rise to prominence in the sphere of Negro education may be largely attributed to the diplomacy he has exercised in his dealings with members of all racial groups. A native of Virginia, he attended St. Paul's Normal and Industrial Institute in that state, the Bluefield State Teachers College in West Virginia, where he became active in fraternal activities, and the University of Pennsylvania, where he received the degree of Philosophy in Education. He gained first-hand knowledge of the pressing educational needs of Southern Negro youth while serving in Louisiana. Today, Brother Gray holds a life-tenure honorary presidency of the Louisiana Interscholastic Athletic and Literary Association, an organization which he founded for the purpose of uniting all of the secondary schools of the state through athletic and literary activities. In 1941, he was elected to the presidency of the Florida Normal and Industrial Institute, a Baptist-supported school heavily debt-encumbered. During the three years of his presidency, the school was rated "A" as a junior

college and later given recognition as a four-year college. A \$50,000 debt was removed, practically all buildings were fully equipped and annual contributions of \$59,000 was obtained from the white and Negro Baptist constituents of the state. The largest war production training program among Negro institutions in the South was inaugurated at this private college by the United State and State education authorities, and a reservists signal corps affiliated with the Fourth Service Command was established under Brother Gray's direction. These latter achievements were unique because of the private nature of the institution.

Upon undertaking the presidency of the Florida Agricultural and Mechanical College, Brother Gray immediately instituted an extensive revision of curriculum designed to provide an educational program to meet the practical and specific needs of Southern Negro youth. Prominent among his innovations has been the establishment of an industrial training program of short one-year courses affording youth, adults, and returned veterans a means of equipping themselves for occupations in the shortest period possible. Far-reaching in its significance is the fact that under his direction, the Florida Agricultural and Mechanical College is destined to become the only Negro state-supported school offering a thorough and efficient nurse-training program. The appropriations which the state legislature has granted the institution since Brother Gray's election to the presidency provide for the erection of a hospital, library, dormitory for women, cafeteria, physical education building and gymnasium.

A well-rounded athlete throughout his early youth, Brother Gray now finds relaxation in tennis and an occasional game of basketball with his students. The presidential family consists of Dr. and Mrs. Gray, Billie Ann, age seven and William Herbert, age five.

James D. Brown, Jr.
Gamma Mu Lambda Chapter of
Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity