

Working title: The Life of James Gilliam Gee

By: Katherine Gaskamp

I. Introduction

- a.** A Southerner by birth, James Gee grew up in the era of Jim Crow and fought in a segregated army during World War I and World War II.
- b.** Following his military service, he took on numerous educational positions, ultimately becoming the President of East Texas State University, now known as Texas A&M Commerce.
- c.** While President of ETSU, Gee oversaw the institution's resistance to federally-mandated school desegregation.
- d.** Thesis: Gee's personal racism and regional alliances prevented him from desegregating ETSU and ultimately led him to retire rather than oversee the integration of the campus.

II. James G. Gee Background

- a.** Born August 20, 1896, in Union County, South Carolina to Judge James Monroe Gee and his wife, Elizabeth Farrar Gee, the young scholar grew up on his parents plantation home. Both parents were well educated, his father graduating "magna cum laude" from Wofford College while his mother graduated with honors from Mary Baldwin College in Virginia.
- b.** Gee Graduated from Clemson A&M College, now known as Clemson University with a Bachelor of Science degree in chemistry in 1917.
- c.** In 1919, after his service in the First World War, Gee received a graduate fellowship to Cornell University where he studied agricultural economics and vocational education.

- d. Played professional baseball for Binghamton, New York during the Spring of 1920. A left-handed hitter, Gee played catcher and outfielder with a batting average of .362.
- e. In 1921, Gee became an associate professor at Sam Houston State Teachers College, now known as Sam Houston State University. While there he met and married Cecile Gibbs of Huntsville.
- f. In 1925 he became the head of the Department of Agriculture Education at the University of Florida and then returned to Clemson as director of athletics and physical education in 1927.
- g. Received his doctor of philosophy degree from George Peabody College for Teachers in 1933 after attending Harvard University and returned to Sam Houston as a professor of Vocational Agriculture and Educational Guidance. In 1937, Gee was promoted to Dean of the College and in 1940-41, he served as acting president of Sam Houston.

III. Gee's Military Service

- a. A veteran of World War I and World War II, Gee began his military career with the Second South Carolina Infantry on the Mexican border (make sure to check this as there are conflicting stories about whether it was on Mexican border or Europe) as a battery commander, and as an instructor in the Field Artillery Officers Training School at Camp Zachary Taylor in Kentucky. During the Second World War, Gee rose to the rank of colonel in the infantry, serving under General George Patton in Europe where he earned four combat stars.

IV. Gee as ETSU president

a. James Gilliam Gee, President of ETSU from 1947-1966.

- i.** Strengthened the student teaching program and inaugurated the first doctorate program in 1962.

b. History of school and system

- i.** In 1911 the 32nd Legislature established the State Normal Schools (now known as the Texas State University System) when it passed House Bill No. 17 and acquired four schools—Sam Houston Normal School, North Texas Normal School, Southwest Texas State Normal School, and West Texas State Normal School.

- ii.** Founded in 1889 the East Texas Normal College became part of the State Normal School Board of Regents in 1917 and was renamed East Texas State Teachers College.

- 1.** Under Gee's tenure as president the Texas Legislature recognized the broadening of education programs offered at the college and renamed it as the East Texas State College in 1957 and in 1962 the name was changed again to East Texas State University following the implementation of the first doctoral program.

c. Brown v. Board of Education and desegregation of system

- i.** On June 4, 1949 the Legislature approves House Bill 52, creating Lamar State College of Technology (now Lamar University) and designating it “a white co-education institution.”

ii. *Brown v. BOE* and James Briscoe of Beaumont applied to Lamar in 1951 with the help of the NAACP Beaumont chapter.

1. Originally accepted, Briscoe arrived on campus in 1951 but the college president, G.A. Wimberly did not admit Briscoe because of the 1949 law that designated Lamar for whites only.

iii. In July 1956 the U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that Lamar must admit qualified African-American applicants which set the stage for desegregating the Texas State University System.

iv. Desegregation of San Marcos and Sul Ross.

d. Ad hoc committee and desegregation of ETSU

i. James Gee created an Ad Hoc committee in the Spring of 1963 to research the desegregation and integration of previous schools within TSUS to ensure a successful and nonviolent campaign at ETSU.

ii. Committee actually an attempt to stall integration.

e. Gee opposed integration of ETSU

f. Gee's steps to prevent desegregation

g. Retirement and life after ETSU

i. Died Friday, October 29, 1982 in Huntsville and is buried at Oakwood Cemetery with full military honors.

V. Conclusion: James Gilliam Gee failed to lead East Texas State University through the desegregation process and instead chose to retire and pass the problem on to someone else.