



Ernest J. Gaines: A Critical Companion (Critical Companions to Popular Contemporary Writers)

Karen Carmean

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Drawing on his rich Louisiana past, Ernest J. Gaines creates a fictional world representative of the human experience. His work explores the complex racial relationships?so much a part of Southern history and culture?and the unwritten and unspoken conventions of caste and class. Often structured around journeys of discovery, Gaines' works affirm the integrity of the individual and the unequivocal place in American life for Americans of African descent. This study offers a clear, accessible reading of Gaines' fiction. It analyzes in turn all of Gaines' novels as well as his collection of short stories. A complete bibliography of Gaines' fiction, as well as selected reviews and criticism, completes the study.

Following a biographical chapter on Gaines' life, an overview of his fiction explores his work in light of his literary heritage and use of genre. Each of the following chapters examines an individual novel: *Catherine Carmier* (1964), *Of Love and Dust* (1967), *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (1971), *In My Father's House* (1978), *A Gathering of Old Men* (1983), *A Lesson Before Dying* (1994), and a collection of short stories, *Bloodline* (1968). The discussion of each work includes sections on plot and character development, thematic issues, and an alternative critical approach from which to read the novel. Carmean shows how each of Gaines' novels focuses on themes of personal value and place and affirms the need for recognizing the value of the individual, regardless of race. This study will help readers to understand the compelling issue of human relationships raised by Gaines and to see why he is one of America's finest writers.

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