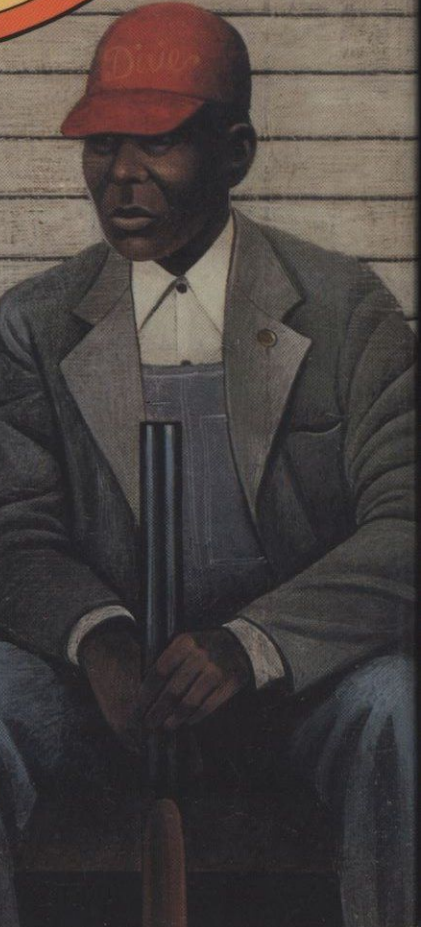
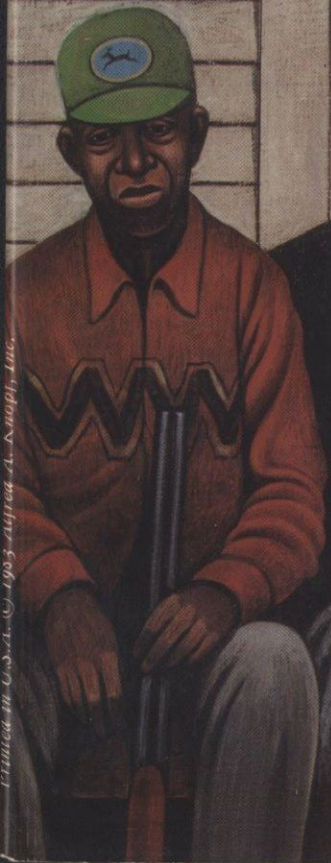
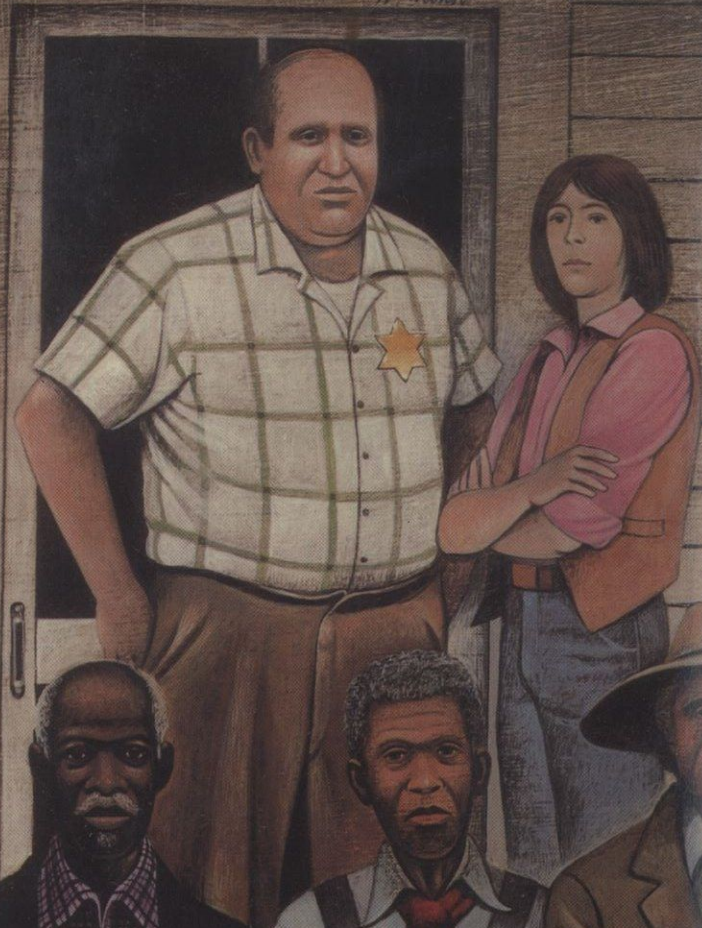


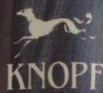
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ERNEST J. GAINES A GATHERING of OLD MEN

ERNEST J. GAINES
A GATHERING of OLD MEN
A NOVEL

394-51468-8



From the author of *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, a profound and unforgettable new novel set in a small corner of the deep South where, over the course of one day, the lives of a group of men and women may be changed forever.

It begins with a murder: in the compound of a backwoods Louisiana plantation Beau Boutan, a Cajun farmer, is found shot. Immediately, we learn that something perhaps even more serious has taken place; we are in a maelstrom of startling events... Candy Marshall, the headstrong young white owner of the plantation (it's been in her family for generations) tells everyone in sight that she shot Beau, imploring them to believe her, though she knows from the start that no one will. And before she calls the sheriff, Candy has gathered more than a dozen aging black men with just-fired shotguns—which most of them seem barely able to carry, much less aim and shoot—each in his turn claiming that *he* shot Beau. Mapes, the old-line country sheriff, finds that even physical force—in the past, a fool-proof method of persuasion and coercion—cannot break down the circle of protection that has suddenly been thrown up around the real murderer. And he realizes too that not only are these men unafraid of an act of vengeance by the Boutan family, but they are waiting for it, welcoming a chance for their own revenge after whole lifetimes of oppression.

The story unfolds—layers peeling back to reveal the truth—in the various voices of the men and women involved. There is Mathu, speaking for all of the black men when he says he's frightened by what might be the consequences of his actions, but "at the same time, I felt kinda good, knowing me and all the rest of us was doing something different, for the first time"... there is Mapes, losing patience with his "suspects" but also feeling a respect for them as each one explains the anger, the pain, the long-buried memories that give this moment of defiance such overwhelming importance... there is Candy, determined to "stand alone before I let them harm my people," even if it means standing in defiance of the very people she means to protect... there is Gil Boutan, Beau's football-hero brother (the only one in the family to leave the bayou), trying to convince Fix,

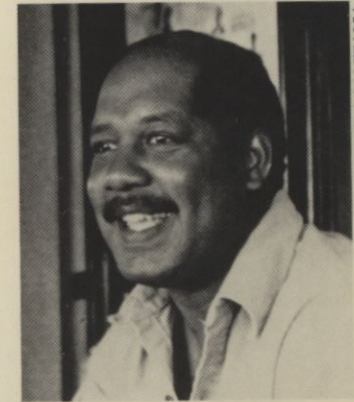
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the Boutan patriarch, that revenge would serve no purpose... and there is Luke Will, a friend of the Boutans, whose idea of the law is a gun and a length of rope...

As the day moves toward its climax, we come to understand the complex relationships that exist between the blacks and the whites, the reasons behind the sudden bursts of courage from the old black men, the almost untenable pride that Candy has inherited from her ancestors... and we sense in this confrontation between two small groups of people the larger issue that faces the South: the conflict between the old ways and the new, between a dark and bloody past and a difficult but viable future.

Ernest Gaines brings to this story the same rich sense of place, the same understanding humor, and the same compassion for a people and their struggle that have informed his previous, widely acclaimed novels.



JIM SANTANA

Ernest J. Gaines was born on a plantation in Pointe Coupée Parish near New Roads, Louisiana, which is the Bayonne of all his fictional works. His most recent novel, *In My Father's House*, was one of the "Fifty Notable Adult Books Published in 1978" selected by the American Library Association. His other works of fiction are the much-acclaimed *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, *Of Love and Dust*, *Catherine Carmier*, and *Bloodline*. He divides his time between San Francisco and the University of Southwestern Louisiana, in Lafayette, where he holds a visiting professorship in Creative Writing.

Jacket illustration and design by Wendell Minor

