



## TOUGALOO COLLEGE NEWS

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### ERNEST J. GAINES TO SPEAK AT PRESIDENTIAL LECTURE

TOUGALOO, MS— Ernest J. Gaines, well known author, is the final Presidential Lecturer in the Presidential Lecture Series for 2005-2006. He will speak at 10:00 a.m. in Woodworth Chapel on the campus of Tougaloo College. At 2:00 p.m., he will conduct a seminar for students in the Owens Health and Wellness Center, Room 212 A&B.

Gaines received The National Humanities Medal on December 20, 2000. He was born on January 15, 1933, on River Lake Plantation in Oscar, a hamlet in Pointe Coupee Parish, Louisiana, which is the Bayonne of all his fictional work. His novel, **A Lesson before Dying**, has sold over two million copies. Nominated for a Pulitzer Prize, **A Lesson before Dying** won in 1994, the *Best Fiction Award* by the National Book Critics Circle, the Southern Writers Conference, and the Louisiana Library Association. It was the October 1997 choice of *Oprah's Book Club*. HBO premiered the TV film in 1999, which subsequently received two Emmy awards.

Gaines is also the author of **Catherine Carmier** (1964), **Of Love and Dust** (1967), **Bloodline** (1968 and reprinted in 1997), **The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman** (1971), **A Long Day in November** (1971), **In My Father's House** (1978), and **A Gathering of Old Men** (1983). **Mozart and Leadbelly**, a collection of stories and essays, was released by Alfred A. Knopf in October of last year.

Raised by his maternal aunt, Augusteen Jefferson, who served as the principal role model for his best known character, Miss Jane Pittman, Ernest Gaines is the oldest of 12 children. At the age of fifteen, he rejoined his mother and step-father in California to continue his education since there was not a high school that he could attend in Pointe Coupee Parish and because it was against the law in Louisiana in the 1940s for people of color to enter public libraries.

Ernest Gaines visited a public library for the first time at age 16. He says, "I discovered the Russians, Turgenev and Gogol, who spoke of the peasants. The French - Flaubert,

Maupassant, Zola. But no one was telling me the story of my people. Thus, a teenager, I decided to write. At San Francisco State University I continued reading – James Joyce, Thomas Mann, Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner. I studied creative writing at Stanford University with Wallace Stegner and worked and worked.”

Offering understanding for readers of all colors, backgrounds and classes, Ernest Gaines’ novels are set in the plantations of the deep South. His works tackle the issues of manhood for men of color, the breakdown in personal relationships as a result of social pressures, the history and folklore of a distant past, and illustrate the thirty years before the civil rights era.

In addition to the *National Humanities Medal*, Gaines is the recipient of many honors including *The Louisiana Center for the Book’s Louisiana Award*, *the National Governor’s Association Award for Distinguished Service in the Arts*, *the Louisiana Governor’s Award for Lifetime Achievement*, and *the Louisiana Writers Award*. He was elected to *The American Academy of Arts and Letters* (1998) and France’s *Chevalier de L’Ordre des Arts et des Lettres* (1996). He is the recipient of a *John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Fellowship* (1993) for lifetime achievements, and a *Guggenheim Fellowship* (1971). Honorary doctorates have been conferred upon him by eleven colleges and universities: *Bard College*, *Brown University*, *Denison University*, *Dillard University*, *Louisiana State University*, *Loyola University*, *Savannah College of Arts and Design*, *Tulane University*, *the University of Miami*, *the University of the South (Sewanee)* and *Whittier College*. He is currently *Writer-in-Residence Emeritus* at the *University of Louisiana*. He is married to *Dianne Saulney Gaines*, an attorney.

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Founded in 1869, Tougaloo College is a private, historically black, coeducational, four-year liberal arts institution, located in Madison County, on the northern edge of Jackson, Mississippi. Known nationally as “The Cradle of the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi,” the College is led by its first female president, Dr. Beverly Wade Hogan. The 13th president of Tougaloo College, Dr. Hogan is a 1973 graduate of the College and a native Mississippian. Under her visionary leadership, the College boasts a student retention rate of 78% and ranks as one the top five historically black colleges and universities whose graduates earn their PhDs in the sciences. More than half (66%) of its graduates enter graduate and professional schools immediately after graduation. Today, Tougaloo College is the leading producer of African American health professionals, including over 40% of the physicians and dentists, practicing in the state of Mississippi. It has produced more than one-third of the state’s African American attorneys and educators, including teachers, principals, and school superintendents.