



MEDIA ADVISORY

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U.S. Postal Service to Issue Ernest J. Gaines Black Heritage Stamp

What: The 46th stamp in the Black Heritage series honors Ernest J. Gaines (1933-2019). Best known for novels “The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman” and “A Lesson Before Dying,” Gaines drew from his childhood as the son of sharecroppers on a Louisiana plantation to explore the untold stories of rural African Americans.

The first-day-of-issue event for the Ernest J Gaines Black Heritage stamp is free and open to the public. News of the stamp is being shared with the hashtags **#BlackHeritageStamps** and **#ErnestGainesStamp**.

Who: The Honorable Donald Lee Moak, Governor, USPS Board of Governors

When: Monday, Jan. 23, 2023, at 11 a.m. CST

Where: University of Louisiana at Lafayette
620 McKinley Street
Lafayette, LA 70503

RSVP: For additional information about the ceremony location and parking on campus, dedication ceremony attendees are encouraged to RSVP at: www.usps.com/ernestgainesbh

Background: Adding a vital African American voice to American literature, Ernest J. Gaines brought worldwide attention to generations of men and women who asserted their own dignity in the face of racial oppression and violence.

Gaines was born on Riverlake Plantation in the town of Oscar just outside New Roads, LA, where his family had lived in the former slave quarters for five

generations. He moved to California in 1948, but for decades afterward, his fiction reflected a deep and unbreakable connection to the rural Louisiana of his youth.

After serving in the Army for two years and graduating from college, Gaines received a prestigious fellowship in 1958 to study creative writing at Stanford University. He published his first novel, "Catherine Carmier," in 1964, but he achieved true fame, widespread acclaim, and a Pulitzer Prize nomination in 1971 with "The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman," a novel chronicling the recollections of its 110-year-old African American protagonist, whose life spans slavery to the civil rights era.

In 1981, Gaines took a position teaching creative writing at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette (then known as the University of Southwestern Louisiana) and soon became its writer-in-residence. In 1983, he published the novel "A Gathering of Old Men," about a group of African American men who assert their humanity and pride in the face of long-standing prejudice and violence.

In 1993, Gaines published his most critically and popularly acclaimed novel, "A Lesson Before Dying," about a college-educated African American teacher who provides education and inspiration to a young farmhand awaiting execution for murder. Over the course of their difficult visits in prison, they form a bond that shows both the need to resist those who would deny them their dignity and self-respect. In addition to earning the National Book Critics Circle Award, "A Lesson Before Dying" resulted in Gaines receiving a prestigious MacArthur Foundation "genius grant."

In 2013, Gaines accepted the National Medal of Arts from President Barack Obama, calling it the greatest honor he had ever received. Today the Baton Rouge Area Foundation continues to endow an annual Ernest J. Gaines Award for Literary Excellence, which recognizes African American fiction writers who are just beginning to rise to national prominence.

Mike Ryan designed the stamp with art by Robert Peterson. Greg Breeding served as art director.

The Ernest J. Gaines Black Heritage stamp is being issued as a Forever stamp. It will always be equal in value to the current First-Class Mail 1-ounce price.

Customers may purchase stamps and other philatelic products through the [Postal Store](#) at usps.com/shopstamps, by calling 844-737-7826, by mail through [USA Philatelic](#) or at Post Office locations nationwide.

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