

A Lesson Before Dying

- By Ernest Gaines

Biography of Ernest Gaines

- Gaines was born in 1933 on River Lake Plantation in Pointe Coupee Parish near the town of New Roads, Louisiana.
- Gaines is the oldest of 12 children and lived in Louisiana for most of his childhood.
- He left Louisiana at age 15 to continue his schooling in San Francisco, California.



Ernest Gaines

- Gaines grew up during a period of segregation between white and black people.
- In 1958, after publishing a few short stories, he won a Wallace Stegner creative writing fellowship to Stanford University, which enabled him to devote himself to his writing.

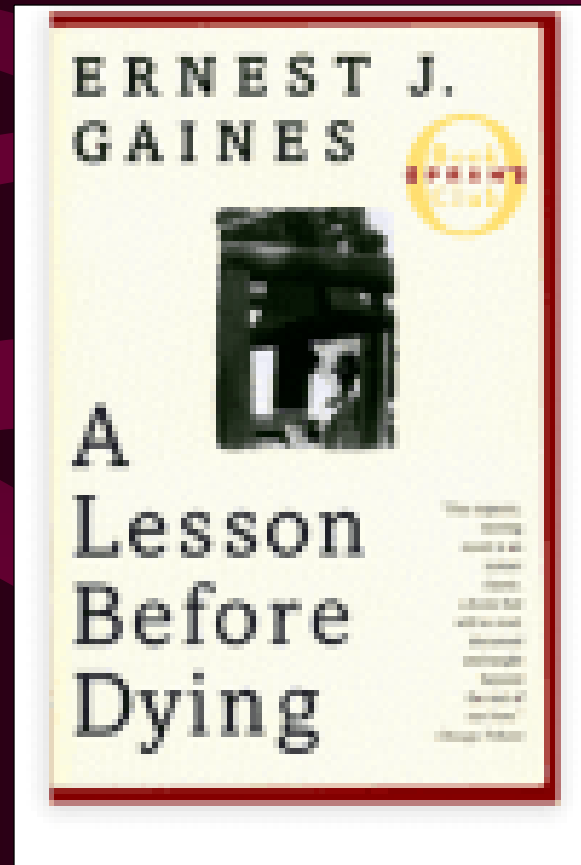


Ernest Gaines

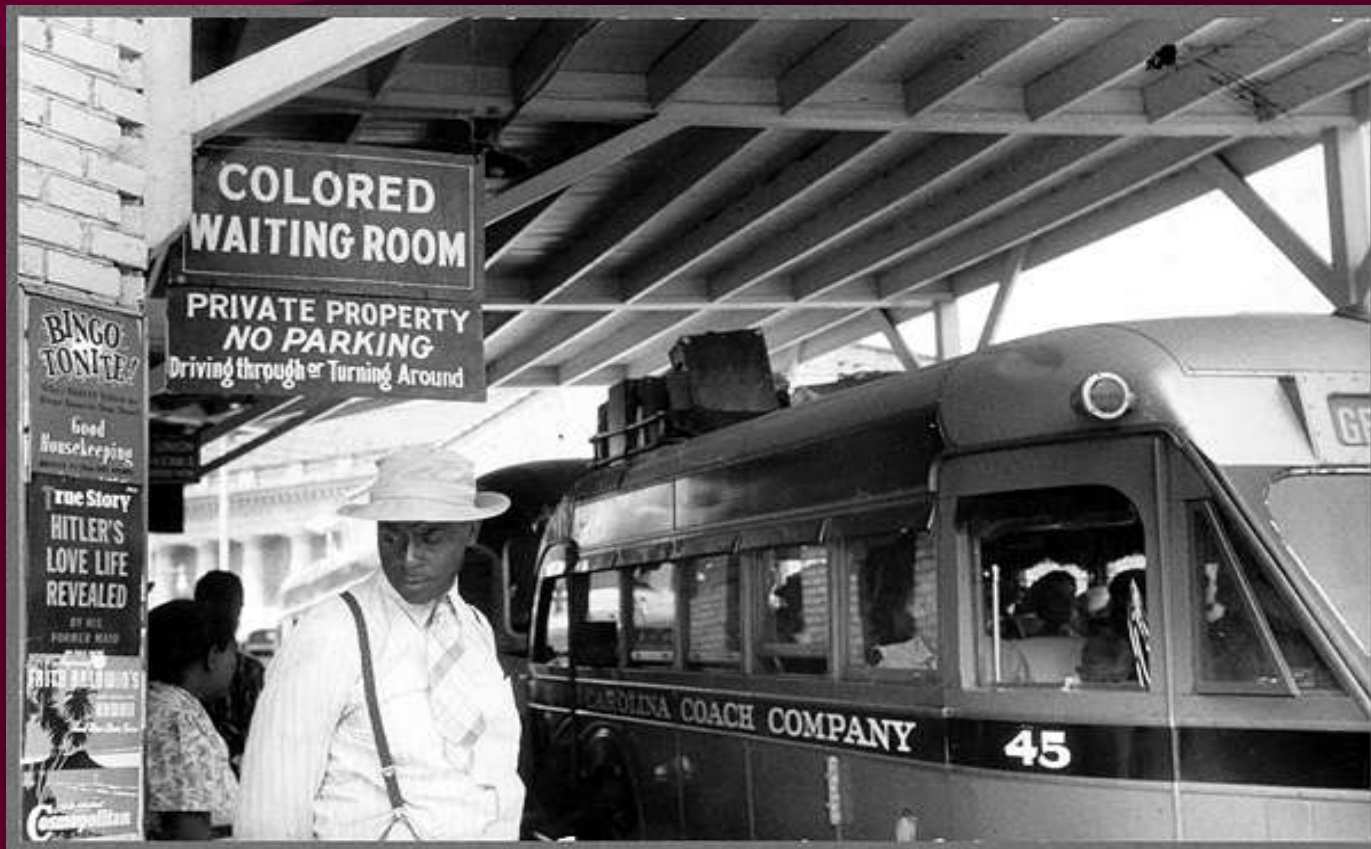
- Though Gaines moved to California at age 15, many of his novels deal with racial issues of the rural South.
- Gaines had a very strong connection to the South throughout his lifetime.
- Aside from being an author, he currently teaches a creative writing seminar at the University of Southwestern Louisiana.

A Lesson Before Dying

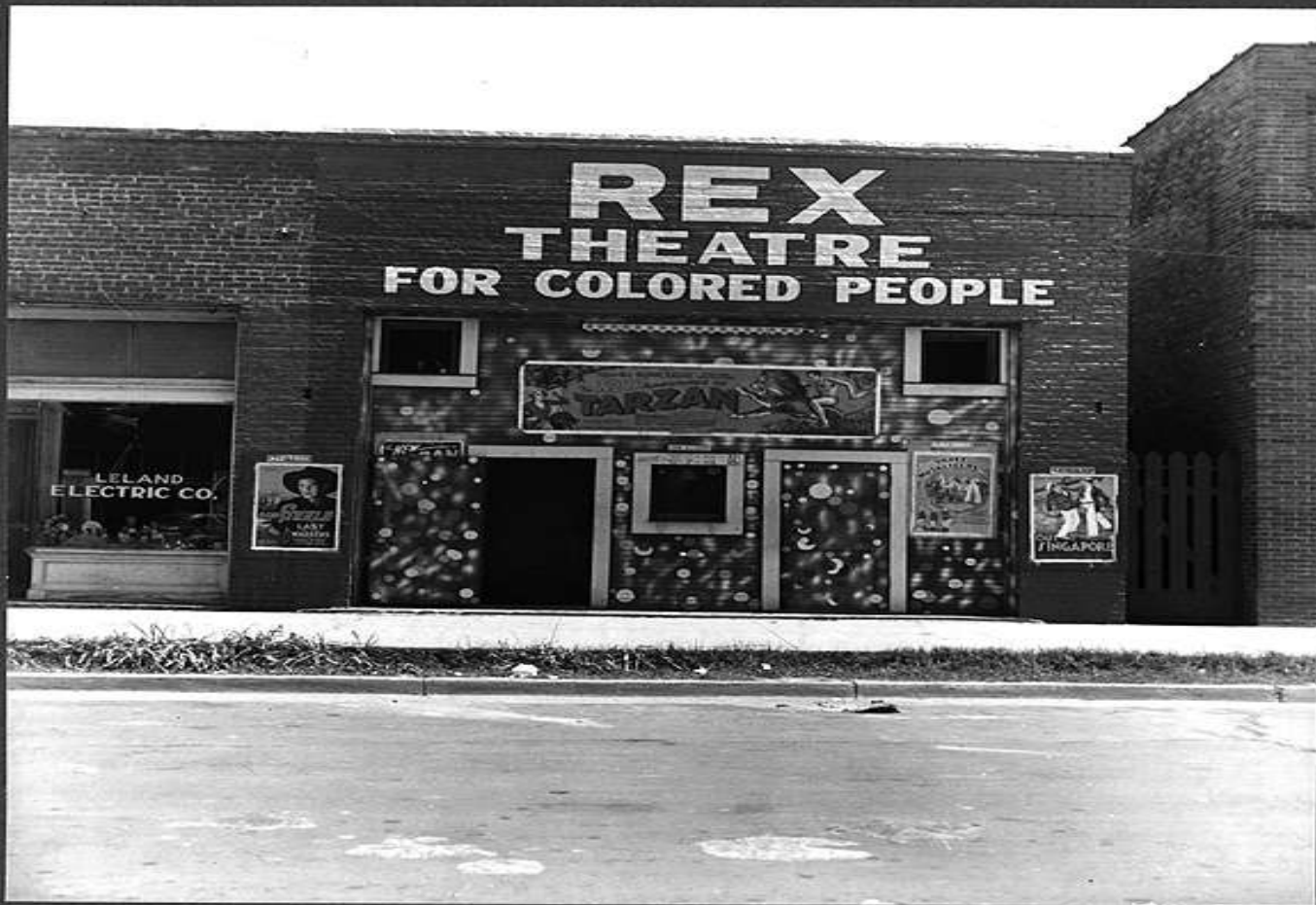
- The novel takes place in a rural Louisiana town during the 1940s.
- During this time, segregation was a very prevalent part of society.
- The novel deals with many racial issues of the time period.



Segregation in the 1940s



Segregation of the 1940s



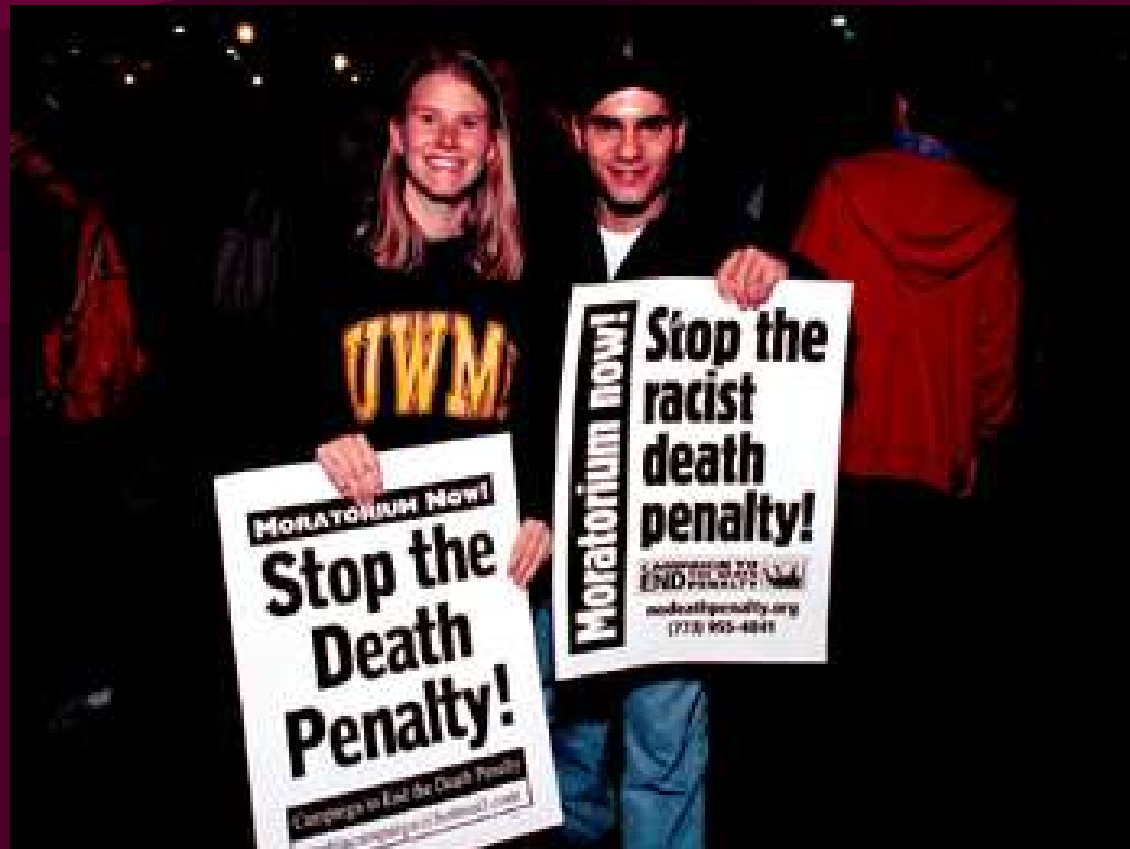
Moral Issues Within the Novel

- Not only does the text deal with issues of race, but it also deals with the issue of justice.
- The novel confronts moral questions surrounding the death penalty, which has been a controversial topic in our society for many decades.

The Death Penalty Debate



The Death Penalty Debate



Brief overview of *A Lesson Before Dying*

- The novel is about the lives of two black men living in a small Louisiana town.
- One, Jefferson, is awaiting execution for a murder he didn't commit; the other, Grant Wiggins, is a teacher whose sense of duty won't let him leave the home he has come to hate.
- Both men learn a valuable lesson from spending time with one another.
- The characters are realistic and represent recurrent themes in American literature.
- A somber mood is maintained through self-pitying central characters, continually pulling down those around them.

MAJOR THEMES EXPLORED

- Racism
- Obligation
- Redemption
- Heroes
- Freedom as a State of Mind



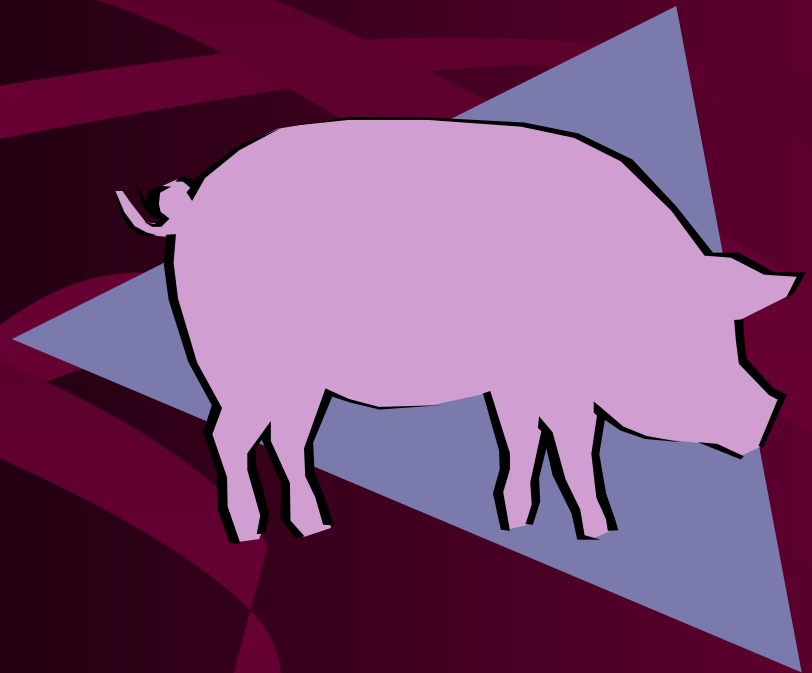
Chapter One Summary

- Jefferson is on trial for a crime he did not commit.
- The crime involved the robbery and murder of a white store owner.
- Jefferson's defense attorney calls him a hog.
- Jefferson is convicted and receives the death penalty.



Chapter Two Summary

- Miss Emma is distraught about Jefferson's sentence and very bothered about the attorney calling Jefferson a hog.
- Miss Emma would like to have the right for someone to visit Jefferson and talk to him while he awaits his execution.
- Tante Lou insists that Grant help Jefferson and make him realize that he is a man and not a hog.



Assignment: 1/31

- Read chapters 3-5
- Choose ONE quote on your worksheet to complete quote analysis on
- Be prepared to discuss chapters/quotes

