



Cherie Quarters

The Place and the People That Inspired Ernest J. Gaines

RUTH LANEY

Cherie Quarters combines personal interviews, biography, and social history to tell the story of a plantation quarter and its most famous resident, renowned Louisiana writer and Pulitzer Prize nominee Ernest J. Gaines. In clear and vivid prose, this original and vital book illuminates the birthplace of a preeminent Black author and the lives of the people who inspired his work.

Before he became an award-winning writer, Gaines was the son of sharecroppers in Cherie Quarters, the workers' community of River Lake Plantation in Pointe Coupée Parish, Louisiana. Drawing on decades of interviews and archival research, Ruth Laney explores the lives and histories of the families, both kin and not, who lived in a place where "everybody was everybody's child." Built as slave cabins in the 1840s, the houses of Cherie Quarters were cold in winter, hot in summer, filled with mosquitoes, and overflowing with people, but the residents made these houses into homes. Laney describes aspects of their daily lives—work, food, entertainment, religion, and education—then expands her focus to the white families who built River Lake Plantation, enslaved its people, and later directed the lives of its Black sharecroppers.

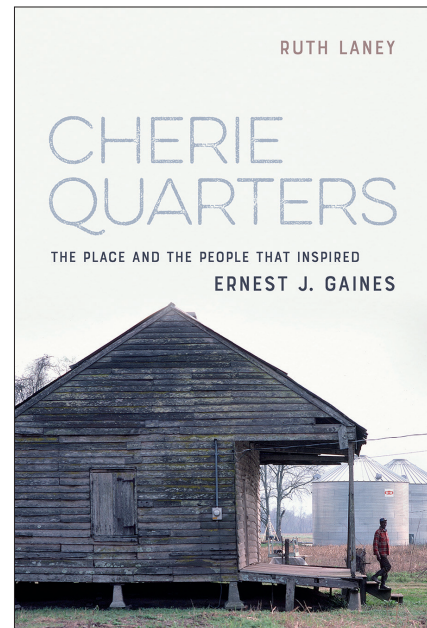
The twenty-first century saw the demise of Cherie Quarters. Like many landmarks of Black American life and history, the few remaining structures were razed or fell into ruin. Laney recounts the ultimately unsuccessful efforts of a small, dedicated group to preserve the vestiges of the community—two slave cabins, the church/schoolhouse, and a shed. Engaging and rich in detail, *Cherie Quarters* highlights the voices of those who called this special place home and shares the story of a lost way of life in South Louisiana.

RUTH LANEY is a journalist who has written about Ernest J. Gaines for the *Southern Review*, *Louisiana Life*, *Louisiana Cultural Vistas*, *Country Roads*, *Emerge*, *The Root*, and other publications. She wrote and co-produced the television documentary *Ernest J. Gaines: Louisiana Stories*.

PRAISE FOR *CHERIE QUARTERS*

"A sprawling, somewhat unconventional, but always fascinating and valuable study of Ernest Gaines and the world that gave rise to his fiction. Part biography, part memoir (touching on the author's own friendship with Gaines), part social history, part reflections on race, class, education, architecture, and historical preservation, this is a very readable work based on the author's own research spanning nearly a half century as well as interviews with Gaines and others who were a part of that world. A significant contribution not only to Gaines studies but also to the study of that part of Louisiana that was Gaines's own postage stamp of native soil."—Fred Hobson, author of *Tell About the South: The Southern Rage to Explain*

"There is no doubt that Ernest J. Gaines knew how to tell a story. *Cherie Quarters* lovingly brings to life the community that inspired those layered tales that touched so many readers. By carefully crafting the history of Gaines's home in words and photographs, Ruth Laney reveals how place in literature is not only a location but also a way of seeing and understanding the world."—W. Ralph Eubanks, author of *A Place Like Mississippi: A Journey Through a Real and Imagined Literary Landscape*



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