Author's Note

I was born on a plantation like the one in this book, and I can still remember the people going out into the fields. *A Long Day in November* could have happened in the late 1930s or in the mid 1940s. There was a one-room schoolhouse on or near every plantation, and all classes were taught by one teacher. An older boy or an older girl would assist the teacher with her younger students. One of the bigger boys would build the fire in the heater and see that the schoolhouse stayed warm all day.

But since World War II the land and the schools have changed tremendously. The one-room schoolhouses are no longer there; school buses take the children to a larger school in town. Machinery now has taken over the cane
cutting that the people used to do by hand. One cane-
cutting machine operated by two or three men can cut as
much cane as fifty men could cut by hand. So the people who
used to go into the fields with their cane knives have had
to seek work elsewhere. Many of them moved to small towns
and to the cities looking for whatever kind of work was
available. The houses where the people once lived have
been torn down, and cane or some other crop has been
planted there. About the only people still living on the plant-
tations now are old people who are too tired and too
burden-laden to pick up and start all over again. They live
on welfare, they raise a few chickens, one or two pigs, and
they raise a little garden beside or behind the house. Most of
them have electricity and some of them even have gas
heaters. Still, there are some who use fireplaces to heat their
rooms and use a coal-oil lamp for light.

I want to include a few words about Madame Toussaint
and say something about voodooism. In nineteenth-century
Louisiana voodooism was as popular in some areas, espe-
cially around New Orleans, as is the belief in psychiatry
today. Not only did illiterate black people believe in voo-
dooism, but many of the educated, rich white people visited
the voodoo queen for advice about love, money, politics, or
anything else that was troubling them.

To this day voodoo queens are still with us. Of course we
are more sophisticated and don't go to them as much as
people did a hundred years ago, but they still exist because
some people still support them. The Madame Toussaints
can be found in almost any large metropolitan area. But
they are not called voodoo queens; today they are called
healers.

As a final word I would like to say again that life as de-
scribed in *A Long Day in November* is just about gone. Technology has destroyed it, and I think all for the best. The work on the plantation was hard and tedious. There was not much else to do but go into the fields and work, come home to rest, then go back to work again. Technology—the cane cutter, cotton picker, hay-baling machines—took this work and forced the people off the land. In the cities the children were able to go to better schools and seek better jobs. Of course the computers are taking over many of these jobs today. So again the people will be forced to work elsewhere. But I have confidence that they will find it.

*Ernest J. Gaines*

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