

Direct and Indirect Protest in Ernest J. Gaines's Fiction: Insights into the Author's Struggle Strategies

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Abstract: This study evaluates the modes of struggle explored in Ernest J. Gaines's fiction set in a rural South marked by the tensions of racism and segregation. Drawing primarily on three works – *Of Love and Dust*, *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, and *A Lesson Before Dying* – it portrays the protest strategies employed by Gaines's main characters in the face of white supremacy. While some directly or openly defy authority, others employ indirect strategies to resist and advocate for change. These strategies reflect those championed by historical figures such as W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington, as well as the wisdom and visions that underpin them. At times, Du Bois's radicalism is appropriate for asserting one's humanity or masculinity, for demanding greater respect or sparking collective awareness. However, for fostering lasting change through peace and longevity, Booker T. Washington's paradigm is essential.

Key words: Booker T. Washington, direct, indirect, protest, strategies, WEB Du Bois.

Résumé :

Cette étude évalue les modes de luttes qu'explore la fiction d'Ernest J. Gaines dans un Sud rural marqué par les tensions esclavagistes et ségrégationnistes. En s'appuyant principalement sur trois œuvres à savoir *Of Love and Dust*, *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* et *A Lesson Before Dying*, elle dépeint les postures de résistance des personnages principaux de Gaines face à la domination par la communauté blanche. Ainsi, alors que les uns défient directement ou ouvertement l'autorité, les autres usent de stratégies indirectes pour résister et prôner le changement. Ces stratégies de luttes reflètent celles préconisées par les grandes figures historiques que sont WEB DuBois et Booker T. Washington ainsi que les sagesses et visions qui les sous-tendent. Par moments, pour signaler son humanité, sa virilité et exiger plus de respect ou déclencher une prise de conscience collective, la radicalité de Dubois est opportune. Mais pour privilégier un changement durable dans la quiétude et la longévité, le paradigme de Booker T. Washington est indispensable.

Mots clés: Booker T. Washington, directe, indirecte, protestation, stratégies, WEB Du Bois.

Introduction

The history of the African American struggle for dignity and freedom has long been marked by a strategic opposition between direct confrontation and indirect resistance. At the beginning of the 20th century, this divergence was particularly embodied by W. E. B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington. While Du Bois called for an open challenge to the segregationist order and an immediate demand for political and social equality, Washington advocated a more cautious approach, prioritizing economic progress, practical education, and strategic adaptation as means of emancipation. This opposition between radicalism and gradualism became a major paradigm for forms of Black protest in America.

In his novels, Ernest J. Gaines revisits this ideological duality through characters who embody different ways of resisting racial oppression in the American South. Some heroes, such as Marcus Payne in *Of Love and Dust* (1967) or Jimmy Aaron in *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (1972), adopt a stance of direct confrontation against white authority, even at the risk of their own destruction. Other characters, like Jane Pittman in *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, or Aunt Lou and Grant Wiggins in *A Lesson Before Dying* (1993), favor indirect forms of protest, based on endurance, education, community preservation, and the gradual transformation of mindsets. Through this opposition, Gaines does not simply depict

survival strategies; he also questions the effectiveness, limitations, and moral implications of the different forms of Black resistance.

Therefore, it is appropriate to ask how Ernest J. Gaines stages, through his characters, the opposition between direct and indirect protest, and to what extent this duality reflects the philosophies of struggle embodied by W. E. B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington.

Drawing on James C. Scott's theory of resistance, namely, his concepts of "public transcripts", "hidden transcripts", and "infrapolitics", particularly in *Weapons of the Weak* (1985) and *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (1990), which investigate how poor and oppressed people resist domination in everyday life, especially when open rebellion is too dangerous. The study also draws upon Du Bois's ideas of direct confrontation, racial pride, collective resistance, the "Talented Tenth", the notion of "veil" (W.E. B. Du Bois, 1920, cover page), and this analysis first explores direct protest through emblematic characters who demonstrate radicalism. Secondly, it highlights indirect protest through characters who advocate gradualism. Thirdly, it analyzes how the writer uses his characters as spokespeople for divergent visions of social change and the quest for African American dignity as suggested by WEB Du Bois and Booker T. Washington. Finally, it attempts to elucidate the moral implications of the African Americans' struggling stances.

1. Direct Protest: Confrontation or Open Challenge in Gaines's Fiction

Although several of Ernest Gaines's works highlight this form of protest, *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* and *Of Love and Dust* embody it best through emblematic characters such as Joe Pittman, Ned Douglass, Jimmy Aaron and Marcus Paine.

1.1. Joe Pittman in *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*

Joe Pittman emerges as one of the strongest symbols of outright rebellion because he rejects the silent submission imposed on Black people in the segregated South. Unlike some characters who favor quiet endurance or cautious adaptation, Joe chooses concrete confrontation with the structures of oppression, particularly in the workplace and in asserting his masculine dignity.

Joe Pittman's first direct opposition to the system of economic domination imposed by white plantation owners appears when he decides to leave Colonel Dye to work elsewhere as a horse trainer. By doing so, he refuses to be kept in a form of disguised servitude. Even when the colonel tries to trap him with an unjust debt, Joe raises the money necessary to set himself free. This act constitutes a direct confrontation with white authority, because, in the Southern context, a black man who challenges the decisions of a white landowner is almost always humiliated, brutalized or killed.

Yet, it is in the assertion of his masculinity and identity through his work as a wild horse trainer that Joe most vividly demonstrates his challenge to the system. By choosing to break horses instead of accepting Colonel Dye's offer of sharecropping, Joe Pittman rejects servility and compromise, and rather opts for masculine pride. On the one hand, the training of horses symbolically becomes a struggle against the forces that seek to dominate Black men. On the other, riding horses puts him in a position in which he can directly challenge the South's

chivalrous tradition of nobility and power. In fact, the image of powerful or noble white men has always been associated with horses. Thus, by becoming a horse breaker, Joe not only asserts his authority in a space traditionally associated with masculine power and courage, but also encroaches on one of Whites' symbols of domination. In this way, as implausible as it may look, Joe Pittman's conviction reflects Booker T. Washington's philosophy of self-reliance. Washington, in *Up From Slavery* (1901), wisely urged Blacks to concern themselves with their economic welfare, to better their socio-economic condition, rather than consuming their time and energy in civil rights claims. He advises Blacks, as reported in "The Atlanta Exposition Address", to "cast down [their] buckets where [they] are' (...) cast it down in agriculture, mechanics, in commerce, in domestic service, and in the professions" (B. T. Washington, 1901, pp. 154-155). His view in *The Future of the American Negro* is clearer: "I have always advised my race to give attention to acquiring property, intelligence, and character, as the necessary bases of good citizenship, rather than to mere political agitation." (B. T. Washington, 1899, p. 97)

As Joe chooses in his last moments to fight against the wild black stallion despite Jane's warnings, he also chooses to face death rather than back down before a force he considers an obstacle to his dignity. The black horse then becomes the symbol of the oppressive and uncontrollable forces of the Southern racial system. Joe dies in this confrontation, but his death takes on a heroic dimension, for it reveals his absolute refusal of fear and submission.

1.2. Jimmy Aaron: the Political Activist

In *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, Jimmy Aaron emerges as another important figure of direct confrontation because he transforms passive Black resistance into an open fight against segregation and racial injustice. Unlike previous generations who prioritized survival and caution, Jimmy adopts a militant stance inspired by the Civil Rights Movement.

Jimmy's chief direct and explicit protest appears as he challenges the segregated order of the South. Upon returning to the plantation after many travels, he realizes that Black people can no longer accept White domination as inevitable. He regards their respect to the color line as crippling and therefore exhorts his fellows to take action against it despite the risks of death and jail. In an attempt to persuade his community to adhere to his project to start a desegregation demonstration, Jimmy declares: "We feel that we crippled now, and been crippled a long time, and every day we put up with the white man insults they cripple us just a little more." (E.J. Gaines, 1972, pp. 226-27) He therefore encourages the black community to overcome the fear inherited from slavery and lynching. His message and attitude which are based on the idea that Black people must now directly confront racist structures in order to obtain their civil rights and human dignity, resonate with Du Bois's radicalist stance expressed in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) and *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil* (1920)

Gaines presents him as the messianic figure the Black community had been waiting for. He organizes the residents, raises their political awareness, and encourages them to participate in protests. His commitment is reminiscent of historical leaders of the Civil Rights Movement such as Martin Luther King Jr., because he believes that change comes through the visible mobilization of the masses.

His confrontation culminates in his plan to walk to Bayonne to drink from the fountain reserved for Whites. This act seems simple, but it actually constitutes a direct challenge to segregation laws. By attempting to use a space forbidden to Black people, Jimmy publicly

defies the Jim Crow system. The fountain then becomes a symbol of the rights denied to African Americans, and Jimmy's action represents a direct demand for equality. This determination makes him a true advocate of direct confrontation: he accepts personal sacrifice in the name of collective liberation. His death before even reaching Bayonne transforms his fight into an act of martyrdom and underscores the violence of the racist system.

Definitely, Jimmy Aaron symbolizes the historical evolution of Black resistance in the novel. Unlike Miss Jane Pittman, he embodies the new generation that believes in immediate change through direct action.

1.3. Marcus Paine and the Open Defiance to the System

Marcus Payne embodies direct confrontation because he refuses any form of submission to white authority and consistently chooses open conflict with the racial and social structures of the segregated South. Through his behavior, his words, and his relationships with other characters, Gaines makes him a rebellious figure who directly challenges the oppressive system.

Sent to Marshall Hebert's plantation as part of a forced labor program for black prisoners, he refuses to adopt the docile attitude expected of him. Unlike Jim Kelly, who prioritizes caution and survival, Marcus speaks defiantly to the White people and refuses to internalize racial inferiority. This attitude already constitutes a direct confrontation with the social norms of the South.

Marcus also uses his language and behavior as weapons of resistance. He deliberately provokes authority figures, notably Sidney Bonbon, the violent Creole foreman in charge of controlling the Black workers. Marcus never hides his contempt for the injustice he suffers. In one of his conversations with Jim, he says: "I aint cut for this kind of life." (E. J. Gaines, 1967, p.45). His provocative responses and refusal to obey reflect a clear desire to publicly defy white power.

Marcus's relationship with Louise, Sidney Bonbon's white wife, represents the most radical act of confrontation in the novel. In the segregated context of the South, a relationship between a black man and a white woman transgresses a fundamental racial taboo. Marcus is fully aware of the danger this represents, but he pursues the relationship. His behavior thus becomes a direct challenge to the racial boundaries established by Southern society.

In sum, Marcus Payne emerges as the embodiment of direct confrontation through his refusal to submit, his constant provocation of white authorities, his transgression of racial barriers, and his determination to preserve his dignity despite the deadly consequences of his struggle.

1.4. Ned Douglass or Educational Activism

As Ned Douglass rejects the established racial order very early and chooses education, speech and identity affirmation as weapons of open resistance against white oppression, he becomes one of the epitomes of direct confrontation. From childhood, he has developed a rebellious spirit in the face of injustice. Raised by Miss Jane after the Civil War, he grows up in a context where Black people remained marginalized despite the abolition of slavery. Unlike those who accepted this situation out of fear, Ned quickly understands that legal freedom does not mean true equality. This awareness fuels his desire to directly combat the racist system.

Through his role as a teacher and activist, he displays fierce opposition to the white community. By becoming a schoolteacher, Ned seeks to awaken the consciousness of Black

people. He teaches not only reading and writing, but also racial dignity and pride. He once told his students:

I say to you now, don't run and do fight. Fight white and black for all this place...Be Americans, but first be men. Look inside yourself. Say, 'What am I? What else beside this black skin that the white man call nigger? Do you know what a nigger is? First a nigger feels below anybody else on earth. He's been beaten so much by the white man, he don't care for nothing else. He talks a lot, but his words don't mean nothing. He'll never be American, and he'll never be a citizen of any other nation. But there's a big difference between a nigger and a black American. A black American cares, and will always struggle. Every day that he get up he hopes that this day will be better. (E. J. Gaines, 1972, p. 110)

Ned's act is significant because in the segregated South, the education of African Americans already constituted a form of political challenge, since an educated Black person threatened the social order founded on ignorance and dependence. What Ned believes is in perfect line with Du Bois in *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil* where the latter claims:

We cannot base the education of future citizens on the present inexcusable inequality of wealth nor physical differences of race. We must seek not to make men carpenters but to make carpenters men. Colored Americans must then with deep determination educate their children in the broadest, highest way. They must fill the colleges with the talented and fill the fields and shops with the intelligent. Wisdom is the principal thing. Therefore, get wisdom. (W. E. B. Du Bois, 1920, p. 210)

By delivering speeches highly critical of white domination, Ned encourages Black people to reject subjugation and stand up for their rights often mentioning Frederick Douglass. He would advise them to fight: "I want my children to fight. Fight for all – not just for a corner. The black man or white man who tell you to stay in a corner want to keep your mind in a corner too" (E. J. Gaines, 1972, p. 110). Ned is portrayed as a man who uses words as a weapon of confrontation. His speeches deeply worry white people, particularly Albert Cluveau and local authorities, because they fear he would inspire a collective rebellion.

Indeed, Ned refuses to hide or renounce his convictions despite the threats. Even knowing he is being watched and is in danger, he continues his activism. This stance shows a direct confrontation with racist power: he chooses neither silence nor self-imposed exile, but rather ideological and public confrontation. His determination makes him a precursor to future civil rights activists.

Ned is assassinated but his death does not destroy his struggle; it transforms his commitment into a legacy for future generations, notably Jimmy Aaron, who would later continue the fight for civil rights. Thus, Ned Douglass emerges as a champion of direct confrontation through his educational activism, his rebellious rhetoric, his refusal to succumb to fear, and his determination to awaken the collective Black consciousness in the face of racial oppression.

Characters like Ned Douglass, Jimmy Aaron and Marcus Paine incarnate what James Scott, in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, conceptualize as "public transcript", that is resistance that is ostensible. Other characters, particularly the old women of *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* and those of *A Lesson Before Dying*, on the other hand, embody his concepts of "infrapolitics" and "hidden politics".

2. Indirect Protest: Endurance, Survival, and Cultural Resistance

Gaines also advocates indirect struggles for change in several of his works, notably *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* and *A Lesson Before Dying*. Among other struggling strategies, education, memory, and community building take a preponderant place.

2.1. Grant Wiggins and Education

In *A Lesson Before Dying*, Grant Wiggins appears as a champion of indirect confrontation because he fights against the racist system not through violence or open revolt, but through education, speech, psychological transformation, and the rebuilding of Black dignity.

Indeed, Grant uses education as a silent weapon of resistance. Although he teaches in precarious conditions, he struggles to develop children's awareness and self-esteem. In a society where White people want to keep Black people ignorant and dependent, the simple act of educating becomes an act of indirect protest. Grant understands that knowledge can gradually weaken the foundations of racism. But the effect of Grant's education is mostly visible with Jefferson. After the white lawyer compares Jefferson to a "hog" during his trial, Grant seeks to restore his humanity and dignity before his execution. Instead of organizing an open rebellion against judicial injustice, he wages a psychological and moral battle. He teaches Jefferson to see himself as a dignified man, capable of dying courageously. This inner transformation becomes a subtle yet powerful way to resist the system that sought to dehumanize Black people.

Furthermore, Grant indirectly challenges racial structures through his dialogues and critical reflections. Although he complies with most of the black southern codes such as the back door entrance, he lucidly analyzes the mechanisms of oppression that trap African Americans in fear and submission. However, unlike a radical activist, he avoids physical confrontation with White people, knowing that it would likely lead to immediate destruction. His strategy instead consists of preserving the dignity and inner integrity of his community.

Consequently, Grant acts as a mediator between several generations and visions of resistance. While Miss Emma and Aunt Lou embody religious faith and traditional endurance, Grant adopts an intellectual and educational approach. He attempts to change mindsets gradually, echoing Booker T. Washington's gradualist doctrine in *Up from Slavery*. His confrontation is therefore indirect because it operates through awareness, reflection, and moral evolution rather than direct confrontation.

Jefferson's ultimate transformation represents the symbolic victory of this indirect resistance. When Jefferson walks with dignity to the electric chair, he destroys the racist stereotype of the inferior and animalistic black man. Grant then understands that his educational and psychological struggle has produced an act of resistance deeper than mere physical revolt. Through this evolution, Gaines shows that indirect confrontation can become a lasting force for liberation and human reaffirmation.

Thus, Grant Wiggins is undoubtedly a proponent of indirect confrontation because he fights racism through education, the restoration of dignity, the transformation of consciousness, and moral resistance rather than through violent or direct confrontation.

2.2. Miss Jane Pittman: Bearing Witness to Resist.

In *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, Jane Pittman represents indirect protest because she resists the racist system not through violence or open confrontation, but through endurance, memory, dignity, and symbolic acts of silent defiance. Gaines portrays her as a figure of gradual resistance whose strength lies in survival and moral perseverance.

Jane resists through her ability to survive all forms of oppression, from slavery to the Civil Rights era. Her mere survival becomes a form of indirect protest against a system that seeks to destroy Black people both physically and psychologically. By enduring generations of injustice without completely losing her dignity, she demonstrates the resilience of the African American community.

Jane's silent and indirect protest also appears through her inward rejection of the logic of submission imposed by white people. From the very beginning of the novel, when she rejects the name "Ticey" (E. J. Gaines, 1972, p. 7) given to her by her masters and chooses "Jane Brown," (E. J. Gaines, 1972, p. 8) she symbolically affirms her identity and her humanity. This gesture seems simple, but it already constitutes an indirect challenge to the authority of slavery, because choosing one's own name is tantamount to claiming personal autonomy.

In addition, Jane practices a daily resistance grounded in prudence and wisdom. Unlike characters such as Ned Douglass or Jimmy Aaron, who choose direct confrontation, Jane understands the dangers of open opposition in the racist South. Her protest, therefore, takes the form of strategies for survival, patience, and maintaining community cohesion. She protects her community, transmits the memory of the past, and preserves Black cultural values despite attempts to erase them. As a matter of fact, Jane plays a vital role as a guardian of African American collective memory. By recounting her story, she bears witness to the violence of slavery, segregation, and social injustices. This testimony constitutes a powerful form of indirect protest, as it prevents Black history from being forgotten or falsified. Jane's act recalls James' Scott's notion of "hidden transcript", by which resistance is organized through wisdom and subtle subversion. Jane's voice thus becomes an act of resistance against the silence imposed on Black people.

Thus, Jane Pittman embodies indirect protest through her endurance, her daily resistance, her preservation of Black memory, and her symbolic acts of defiance against racial oppression.

2.3. Aunt Lou and the Community Faith

In *A Lesson Before Dying*, Aunt Lou represents indirect confrontation because of her resistance to the racist system through faith, dignity, moral perseverance, and community pressure rather than open conflict. Her struggle is discreet, yet profoundly strategic and effective.

Aunt Lou defends Black dignity in a context of segregation where African Americans are constantly humiliated. Even if she ostensibly respects certain rules imposed by Whites, she interiorly rejects their dehumanizing logic. Her way of speaking, behaving, and raising Grant reflects a desire to preserve the honor and values of her community despite oppression. She exerts a form of indirect confrontation through her moral authority as she compels Grant to visit Jefferson. She understands that true resistance lies in preventing Jefferson from dying with the belief of being a hog. By forcing Grant to act, she participates in a symbolic struggle against the racist discourse of the white court.

Aunt Lou's use of religion also operates as an instrument of silent resistance. Because of her great Christian faith, she struggles to maintain hope and cohesion within the Black community in the face of injustice. Through Aunt Lou spiritual commitment, Gaines presents spirituality as an indirect weapon against the despair produced by racism. Aunt Lou believes that human dignity and community solidarity can survive even in an oppressive system.

Aunt Lou is actually a perfect epitome of indirect protest because she manages to circumvent the stringent social codes of the segregated South in order to protect her community. Unlike figures of direct confrontation, she avoids open clashes with White people, knowing the violent consequences that can ensue. However, this caution does not signify submission. Her resistance is expressed through endurance, moral discipline, and the transmission of values of respect and courage to younger generations.

It is in Jefferson's transformation that Aunt Lou's impact as an indirect influencer is perceived. Without her determination, Grant might never have accepted his mission. Thus, even though she operates behind the scenes, she becomes one of the main forces of moral change in the novel. Through her, Gaines shows that older Black women often play a central role in the cultural and spiritual survival of the African American community.

Therefore, Aunt Lou is an architect of indirect confrontation because she fights racial oppression through faith, moral authority, the preservation of collective dignity, and the quiet transformation of consciences rather than through open revolt.

3. Resistance and Change in Ernest J. Gaines' Works: Between Duboisian and Bookerian Philosophies.

Through *Of Love and Dust*, *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, and *A Lesson Before Dying*, Ernest J. Gaines portrays Black characters confronted with racial violence, humiliation, and the limitations imposed by the American segregationist system. Faced with this oppression, his protagonists develop various forms of resistance that can be linked to the two major ideological orientations of African American thought: the militant philosophy of W. E. B. Du Bois and the accommodating pragmatism of Booker T. Washington. Where Du Bois advocates the immediate demand for civil rights, intellectual education, and open confrontation with injustice, Booker T. Washington prioritizes patience, economic self-reliance, work, and gradual adaptation to the dominant system. Gaines's characters constantly oscillate between these two models of struggle, thus revealing the complexity of Black resistance in the American South.

In Gaines's novels, certain characters clearly embody a Du Bois-like stance based on direct confrontation with the racial order. Marcus Paine, in *Of Love and Dust*, represents the most striking example of this frontal resistance. Refusing any psychological submission to white power, Marcus openly defies Sidney Bonbon and refuses to accept the humiliations imposed on Black people. His relationship with Louise, a white woman, is itself an act of defiance against the implicit laws of Southern segregation. Marcus prefers to risk death rather than live in fear and acceptance. This attitude aligns with Du Bois's thinking, which condemned racial accommodation and demanded immediate equality between Black and White people. Like Du Bois's activists, Marcus believes that Black dignity is non-negotiable as he once told Jim: "can't you see I ain't like that" (E. J. Gaines, 1967, 199)

This same ideological orientation also appears in Ned Douglass's *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*. After leaving the South, Ned returns with a more developed political consciousness and seeks to awaken his people through education and activism. He encourages Black people to no longer passively accept injustice and insists on the necessity of collective awareness. Through Ned, Gaines aligns with Du Bois's vision of the "Talented Tenth," according to which a Black intellectual elite must guide the community toward emancipation:

The Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men. The problem of education, then, among Negroes must first of all deal with the Talented Tenth; it is the problem of developing the Best of this race that they may guide the Mass away from the contamination and death of the Worst, in their own and other races (...) On this foundation we may build bread winning, skill of quickness of brain, with never a fear lest the child and man mistake the means of living for the object of living. (W. E. B. Du Bois, 1903, p. 189)

Education thus becomes a political weapon intended to combat racial oppression.

Jimmy Aaron represents the culmination of this activist tradition. A near-messianic figure in *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, Jimmy symbolizes the emergence of the Civil Rights Movement and the hope for collective change. Unlike Joe Pittman, his struggle is not merely about individual survival but about the profound transformation of Southern society. His commitment recalls the battles waged by activists inspired by Du Bois, particularly through his call for community mobilization and social justice.

However, Gaines does not limit Black resistance to direct confrontation alone. Several characters, instead, adopt a more cautious and gradual strategy reminiscent of Booker T. Washington's philosophy. In *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, Jane Pittman embodies this silent resistance based on endurance, memory, and survival. Having lived through slavery, Reconstruction, and segregation, Jane understands the dangers of direct opposition to white power. Her resistance consists primarily of preserving Black history, protecting her community, and passing on the experiences of the past to future generations. This strategy evokes Booker's pragmatism, which favored gradual adaptation to the system to ensure the survival and progress of the Black community.

Joe Pittman also exemplifies this approach. His primary goal is to achieve a degree of autonomy through work and personal effort. Like Booker T. Washington, he believes that Black dignity can be achieved through economic independence and the appreciation of manual labor. Joe avoids direct political confrontations and simply seeks to build a stable life in a hostile environment. Yet, Gaines also reveals the limitations of this philosophy: despite his courage and hard work, Joe remains vulnerable to the violence of the racial system.

In *A Lesson Before Dying*, Grant Wiggins occupies an intermediate position between the two ideological traditions. At the beginning of the novel, Grant adopts an attitude close to Booker T. Washington's pragmatism. Disillusioned and weary of everyday racism, he prioritizes personal survival and avoids any direct confrontation with white people. However, his relationship with Jefferson gradually transforms him. By helping Jefferson die with dignity, Grant understands that education and community responsibility can become instruments of resistance. His evolution then brings him closer to Du Bois's thinking. Grant thus appears as a hybrid character who illustrates the tension between cautious accommodation and militant commitment.

Aunt Lou, for her part, represents another form of indirect resistance. Her strength lies in moral discipline, religious faith, and the importance she places on education. She fights quietly to preserve the dignity of her community despite the humiliations imposed by segregated society. Her patience and adherence to traditional values recall certain aspects of Booker T. Washington's philosophy. However, her emphasis on education and human dignity also resonates with some of Du Bois's concerns.

Thus, the works of Ernest J. Gaines reveal that the Black struggle cannot be reduced to a single strategy. Through Marcus Paine, Ned Douglass, and Jimmy Aaron, Gaines values direct confrontation and the open demand for civil rights, akin to the thinking of Du Bois. Through Jane Pittman, Joe Pittman, and Aunt Lou, he also demonstrates the importance of daily survival, endurance, and community solidarity, reminiscent of the pragmatism of Booker T. Washington. Finally, characters like Grant Wiggins show that these two philosophies are not necessarily opposed but can complement each other.

4. Insights in Gaines's Protest Methods

The relevance of Ernest J. Gaines's strategies of protest lies in their ability to demonstrate that the struggle against oppression is neither uniform nor monolithic. Through the coexistence of direct and indirect protest, Gaines conveys the idea that there are several legitimate ways to resist injustice, depending on the context, generation, personality, and objectives pursued.

First, direct protest appears relevant because it breaks the silence and rejects the normalization of oppression. Characters like Marcus Payne and Jimmy Aaron refuse the fear and humiliation imposed by segregated society. Their defiance becomes an act of reaffirming Black humanity. Even when it leads to death, this stance produces a collective awakening: it inspires the community, exposes the violence of the racist system, and symbolically paves the way for change. Gaines thus shows that certain injustices require courageous voices capable of provoking a historical rupture. This perspective aligns with the combative spirit of W. E. B. Du Bois, for whom rights and dignity must be claimed without delay.

Indirect protest also holds profound relevance, as it prioritizes survival, transmission, and the gradual transformation of mindsets. In Gaines's work, figures like Jane Pittman, Aunt Lou, and Grant Wiggins understand that resistance can also be achieved through education, strategic patience, community cohesion, and the preservation of everyday dignity. This form of struggle sometimes avoids immediate destruction and allows for the slow but lasting construction of a collective consciousness. Gaines thus emphasizes that discretion is not necessarily a weakness: it can constitute a tactic of resilience and social reconstruction. This approach is suggestive of Booker T. Washington's gradualist philosophy.

Gaines's fundamental message, therefore, seems to be that Black liberation cannot depend on a single method of struggle. Direct confrontation and indirect resistance appear as complementary rather than opposing forces. Radical figures create ruptures and awaken awareness, while patient figures ensure continuity, survival, and community reconstruction.

Gaines thus invites us to understand that great social transformations often arise from the interplay between heroic sacrifice and daily endurance.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the study of direct and indirect protest in the work of Ernest J. Gaines reveals the full complexity of the resistance strategies developed by African Americans in the face of racial oppression. Through characters such as Marcus Payne and Jimmy Aaron, Gaines portrays direct protest, marked by open confrontation, a refusal to submit, and a willingness to immediately challenge the segregationist order, even at the cost of death. These figures recall the militant philosophy of W. E. B. Du Bois, founded on the immediate demand for justice and dignity. In parallel, characters like Jane Pittman, Aunt Lou, and Grant Wiggins embody indirect protest, more discreet but just as significant, which prioritizes endurance, education, community preservation, and the gradual transformation of consciousness. This stance echoes the accommodating and gradualist thinking of Booker T. Washington.

However, Gaines's major strength lies in the fact that he does not systematically rank these two forms of struggle. On the contrary, he demonstrates their complementarity and relevance depending on the historical, social, and human context. Direct protest emerges as a powerful instrument for disruption and awakening consciousness, while indirect protest fosters survival, community stability, and lasting transformations. Defiant figures often die young, but their sacrifices become symbols of resistance; those who adopt more patient strategies survive longer and contribute to the moral and social reconstruction of their community.

Thus, Gaines's work transcends a simple opposition between radicalism and accommodation. It offers a nuanced reflection on the multiple paths to social change and on the necessity, for oppressed peoples, of sometimes alternating confrontation with strategic patience. By putting the ideological legacies of Du Bois and Booker T. Washington into dialogue, Gaines ultimately suggests that the quest for black freedom cannot be reduced to a single method of struggle, but that it is built in the coexistence of diverse resistances, all bearing the same aspiration to human dignity.

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