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THE NARRATIVE OF AGING:
THE PORTRAYAL OF THE AGED
IN
TONI MORRISON AND ERNEST J. GAINES

A Dissertation Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

In partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Ihab M. Freiz

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

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Indiana University of Pennsylvania
The School of Graduate Studies and Research
Department of English

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Title: The Narrative of Aging: The Portrayal of the Aged in Toni Morrison and Ernest J. Gaines

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Summary:

Research on minority aging has been done extensively in many fields such as sociology, psychology, economics, medicine, and so forth. However, the research is still lacking in the literary field and, consequently, minority aging has too often been a missing trope in contemporary literary theory. Although historians, sociologists, and psychologists have largely overlooked the important roles that elderly blacks can play in society, the authors of fiction show that they are central in the community. The dissertation studies the portrayals of the elderly by examining the ways that age and aging are represented in African American fiction. The goal is to highlight the positive aspects of aging and to see how the elderly blacks are able to survive their hard conditions with dignity. Depictions are believed to reflect the images, ideals and values of the African American society that contradict the insidious theme of ageism and the negative stereotyping of the elderly. The dissertation samples novels by both Toni Morrison and Ernest J. Gaines where the topics of aging and old age are evident but not at all dominant. Some of the characters are old, positive and negative depictions being equally divided among them. Issues such as class, gender, race/ethnicity and culture inform the concept of aging in these novels, and the theme of old age is pursued fully and tied precisely to Morrison and Gaines whose works are considered a new “act of emancipation” for a culture some still consider to be “enslaved.”