

John Jakes: A Critical Companion (Critical Companions to Popular Contemporary Writers)

Mary Ellen Jones

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John Jakes, often called the people's author and godfather of the historical novel, has made American history come to life in his series The Kent Family Chronicles and The North and South Trilogy. Through these novels, Jakes conveys the sweep of American history, both its glory and its grim scenes, from the American Revolution to the opening moments of the 20th century. Never glossing over the nation's flaws (slavery, materialism, a double-edged Manifest Destiny), Jakes nevertheless affirms American values. This is the first full-length critical study of his work. It examines in detail Jakes' 13 major novels to date and assesses his methods as America's history teacher.

In Part I, following a chapter on Jakes' life, Jones examines the early novels and Jakes' use of the genres of historical fiction, the western, and the historical family sage. Part II, The Kent Family Chronicles, devotes an individual chapter to each of the novels in this series, The Bastard, The Rebels, The Seekers, The Furies, The Titans, The Warriors,

The Lawless, and The Americans. Part III, New Beginnings, features chapters on North and South, Love and War, and Heaven and Hell, and chapters on California Gold and Homeland. The examination of each novel in this study includes sections on plot development, character development, and thematic issues. Jones also offers an alternative critical perspective from which to read each novel—such as feminist literary criticism, New Historicism, Marxist criticism, and Deconstructionism—that gives the reader an alternative viewpoint from which to consider the novel. A complete bibliography of all of John Jakes' work, works about John Jakes, and a listing of reviews of all the novels examined in the book concludes the study.



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