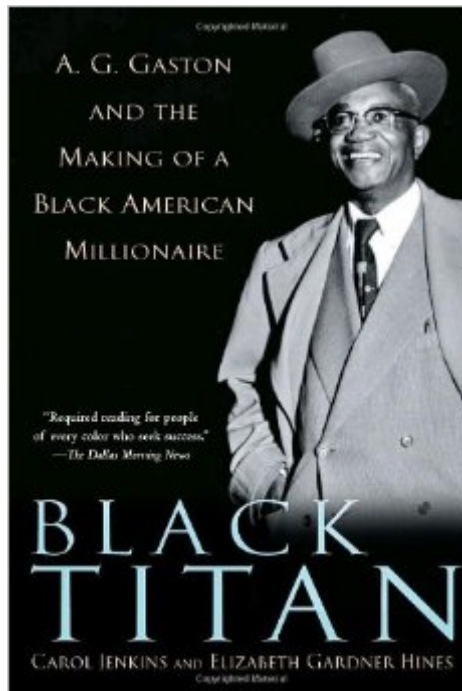


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Black Titan: A.G. Gaston And The Making Of A Black American Millionaire



Synopsis

The grandson of slaves, born into poverty in 1892 in the Deep South, A. G. Gaston died more than a century later with a fortune worth well over \$130 million and a business empire spanning communications, real estate, and insurance. Gaston was, by any measure, a heroic figure whose wealth and influence bore comparison to J. P. Morgan and Andrew Carnegie. Here, for the first time, is the story of the life of this extraordinary pioneer, told by his niece and grandniece, the award-winning television journalist Carol Jenkins and her daughter Elizabeth Gardner Hines. Born at a time when the bitter legacy of slavery and Reconstruction still poisoned the lives of black Americans, Gaston was determined to make a difference for himself and his people. His first job, after serving in the celebrated all-black regiment during World War I, bound him to the near-slavery of an Alabama coal mine—but even here Gaston saw not only hope but opportunity. He launched a business selling lunches to fellow miners, soon established a rudimentary bank—and from then on there was no stopping him. A kind of black Horatio Alger, Gaston let a single, powerful question be his guide: What do our people need now? His success flowed from an uncanny genius for knowing the answer. Combining rich family lore with a deep knowledge of American social and economic history, Carol Jenkins and Elizabeth Hines unfold Gaston's success story against the backdrop of a century of crushing racial hatred and bigotry. Gaston not only survived the hardships of being black during the Depression, he flourished, and by the 1950s he was ruling a Birmingham-based business empire. When the movement for civil rights swept through the South in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Gaston provided critical financial support to many activists. At the time of his death in 1996, A. G. Gaston was one of the wealthiest black men in America, if not the wealthiest. But his legacy extended far beyond the monetary. He was a man who had proved it was possible to overcome staggering odds and make a place for himself as a leader, a captain of industry, and a far-sighted philanthropist. Writing with grace and power, Jenkins and Hines bring their distinguished ancestor fully to life in the pages of this book. *Black Titan* is the story of a man who created his own future—and in the process, blazed a future for all black businesspeople in America. From the Hardcover edition.

Book Information

Paperback: 344 pages

Publisher: One World/Ballantine (January 25, 2005)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0345453484

ISBN-13: 978-0345453488

Product Dimensions: 5.6 x 0.7 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 9.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars Â Â See all reviews Â (58 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #66,060 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #32 in Â Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Regional U.S. > South #60 in Â Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Professionals & Academics > Lawyers & Judges #197 in Â Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Ethnic & National > African-American & Black

Customer Reviews

We learned in *Our Kind of People* that there have always been rich black folk; what is shameful is our lack of exposure or knowledge of such individuals. A.J. Gaston was one of the wealthiest black men and the first black millionaire. His story has been detailed by his niece, journalist/broadcaster Carol Jenkins, and her daughter, Elizabeth Gardner Hines in *Black Titan*, a revealing biography that is both compelling and forthright. Gaston, who was born poor in Alabama in 1892 and raised partially by his maternal grandparents in Demopolis, then went to live with his mother, Rosie, in Birmingham where she worked as a maid for a prominent white family. In Birmingham Gaston went to the Tuggle Institute for high school where he came in contact with Booker T. Washington who would remain one of his biggest influences. After he left high school, he supported himself with jobs such as delivering newspapers and factory work until he entered the army. It was overseas in France that he felt like a man but was brought back to reality when he returned to Jim Crow Alabama. Gaston went to work in the mines; dirty, grueling work but it was there where his entrepreneurial spirit was born. He sold his mother's catered lunches to the other miners and always being frugal, and then started a loan business. A businessman in the making, he then partnered with the Baptist church to start burial insurance and funeral businesses. Little by little these enterprises grew and when he partnered with A.L. Smith, who was already an established businessman, his ventures grew. Gaston & Smith proved to be very profitable professionally and personally when he married Smith's daughter Creola. They worked together and when she died, he married Minnie Gardner, a school teacher who came from a prominent family.

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