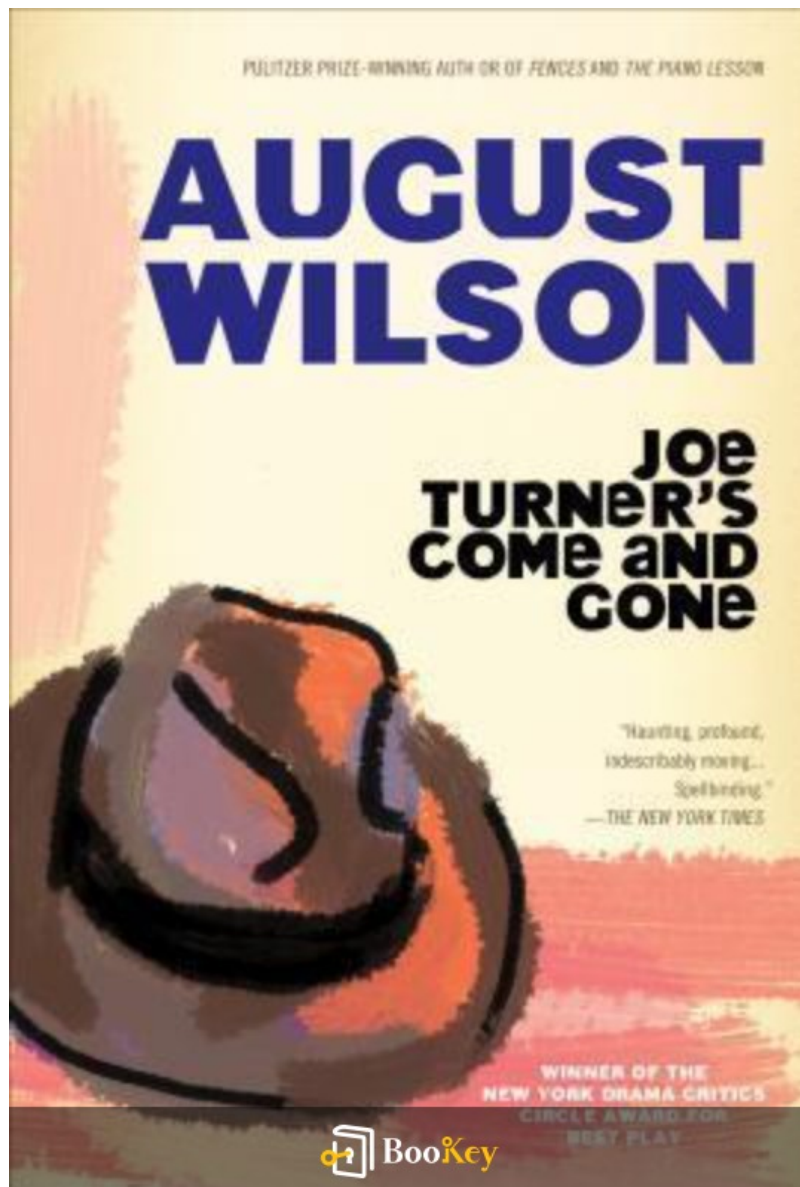


# Joe Turner's Come And Gone PDF

August Wilson



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# About the book

Exploring African American Life in August Wilson's "Joe Turner's Come and Gone"

Setting:

- Pittsburgh boarding house, 1910s

Main Themes:

- Resilience of the African American community
- The shadow of slavery vs. newfound freedom
- Search for identity and connection
- Dislocation and redemption
- Hope and self-discovery

Key Character:

- Herald Loomis:
  - A man affected by unjust imprisonment.
  - Driven by the desire to reunite with his lost family.

\*Loomis's journey is central to the narrative, showcasing his struggles and aspirations.\*

Artistic Elements:

- Haunting lyricality of the dialogue.
- Engagement with African spirituality and the rhythms of blues music.

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### Impact of the Play:

- More than a historical exposition; it serves as a poignant exploration of trauma and the relentless pursuit of purpose.
- Each line in the play echoes the past while reflecting the ongoing human journey toward healing and hope.

### Conclusion:

"Joe Turner's Come and Gone" is not merely a play about history; it's a profound narrative that resonates with every generation, reminding us of the struggles and enduring spirits that shape both past and present.



# About the author

Biography Highlight: August Wilson (1945-2005)

- Background: Born Frederick August Kittel Jr. in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, August Wilson spent his formative years in the Hill District, a vibrant community that would serve as the inspiration for much of his theatrical work.
- Contribution to Theater: Wilson is revered as a groundbreaking American playwright who deeply impacted modern theater by highlighting the complexities of African American experiences and historical narratives.
- Pittsburgh Cycle: His most notable achievement is the 10-play cycle known as the Pittsburgh Cycle or the Century Cycle. This series portrays the African American journey throughout each decade of the 20th century, showcasing their struggles and resilience.
- Awards Recognition: Wilson's extraordinary talent earned him two Pulitzer Prizes for Drama, awarded for his iconic plays "Fences" and "The Piano Lesson."
- Legacy: August Wilson's work remains a powerful voice in American literature and theater, resonating with audiences through its profound

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exploration of cultural identity, history, and the unyielding spirit of the African American community.

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# Joe Turner's Come And Gone Summary

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# Joe Turner's Come And Gone Summary

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# 1. Chapter 1: Understanding the Historical Context of African American Life in 1911

In 1911, the United States was a time of significant social and economic tapestry for African Americans, who were navigating the complexities of life in a post-Reconstruction society. The repercussions of slavery had not only forged a collective cultural identity among Black people but had also set them on a path filled with struggles against systemic oppression and the quest for agency in an evolving nation. The societal context of 1911 was marked by deep-rooted racial tensions, economic instability, and a profound sense of longing for identity and autonomy.

After the Civil War, African Americans experienced a brief period of hope during Reconstruction, where there was an attempt to integrate them into society as equals. However, this hope was curtailed as Jim Crow laws emerged, particularly in the Southern states, where enforced segregation became commonplace. By 1911, many African Americans had migrated north in search of better economic opportunities and a reprieve from the harsh realities of southern oppression. This migration marked the beginnings of the Great Migration, a significant movement that saw millions of African Americans leave the South in pursuit of employment in industrial cities like Chicago, Detroit, and Pittsburgh.

In the North, African Americans faced a different kind of challenge; while



there were opportunities in factories and urban jobs, they also confronted institutional racism in housing, employment, and social services.

Discriminatory practices limited their access to better jobs, relegating many to menial labor despite their aspirations for advancement. For example, in the steel mills of Pittsburgh, African Americans worked under strenuous conditions and were often paid less than their white counterparts, reflecting the pervasive inequalities that were ingrained in society at the time.

The year 1911 was also a period characterized by a growing awareness and advocacy for civil rights within the Black community. Organizations such as the NAACP, founded in 1909, started to gain momentum, actively campaigning against lynching and fighting for the political and social rights of African Americans. Intellectuals like W.E.B. Du Bois were rising as prominent voices, challenging the notion of racial inferiority and demanding equal rights through political engagement and activism. The African American community was rallying around the principle of the "Talented Tenth," promoting education and leadership among the Black elite to uplift the entire race.

Additionally, cultural movements began to take shape during this era. The Harlem Renaissance, which would later explode in the 1920s, started to germinate ideas of racial pride and cultural expression. Artistic endeavors became a means of tackling racial issues and preserving African American

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heritage, setting the stage for a new era of Black art and literature that would emerge in the decades to follow.

In terms of family structure and community dynamics, the boarding house became a crucial setting for many African Americans in urban areas. Locations such as those featured in "Joe Turner's Come and Gone" act as microcosms of the larger struggles faced by the community. They served not only as living spaces but also as gathering places where individuals could connect, share stories, and find solace in their shared experiences. The interdependence within these spaces highlights the resilience of community ties in the face of adversity, as families often had to rely on each other for support, both emotionally and economically.

Ultimately, 1911 stood at a crossroads for African Americans. It was a year charged with the complexities of racial identities and the fight against oppression that would shape subsequent generations. In understanding the historical context of this period, readers can begin to grasp why the characters in Wilson's play are grappling with themes of identity, community, and belonging, making the struggles and aspirations that unfold within the narrative profoundly rooted in the realities of their time.

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## 2. Chapter 2: Introducing the Characters: Their Struggles and Aspirations

In August Wilson's play "Joe Turner's Come and Gone," the narrative unfolds around the lives of several characters residing in a boarding house in Pittsburgh, each bearing unique struggles and aspirations reflective of African American life in the early 20th century. The complex tapestry of their backgrounds and desires brings poignant depth to the play, underscoring the themes of identity, community, and resilience.

Central to the story is Herald Loomis, a man haunted by his past and his experiences with Joe Turner, a figure representing the oppression and exploitation of black men through forced labor and kidnapping. Herald's struggle is not only to reclaim his personal identity after years of trauma but also to reconnect with his estranged wife, Zonia. Herald's aspiration to find his place in a world that has stripped him of his dignity is a crucial driver of the plot. His inner turmoil is amplified by his relentless quest for recognition and a sense of belonging, both as a man and as an African American.

Another prominent character is Bynum Walker, a spiritual and somewhat eccentric figure who acts as a bridge between the past and present. Bynum is deeply connected to African spiritual traditions. He speaks of the importance of finding one's "song," which symbolizes personal authenticity and connection to heritage. His aspirations are shaped by a desire to help others



discover their own identities, showcasing the communal elements inherent in the African American experience. Bynum's philosophical reflections and his attempts to guide Herald illustrate the theme of mentorship amid struggle.

Then there's Martha, who, like many of the women of her time, grapples with the intersection of race, gender, and societal expectations. Her aspirations center around creating a stable life for herself and her daughter, yet she faces the harsh realities of economic instability. The boarding house represents both a refuge and a battleground for Martha, as she strives to maintain her dignity while navigating the judgments of community and the challenges of survival.

Furthermore, there is a significant subplot surrounding the character of Bertha, who manages the boarding house with a sense of authority and practicality. Her aspirations are tied to the maintenance of the household and the well-being of its residents. Bertha's struggles are often overlooked, but they highlight an essential aspect of the African American woman's experience: the burden of caretaking and the desire for personal fulfillment within the constraints imposed by society.

Moreover, the character of Rutherford Selig serves as a representation of the outside world interacting with the lives of the boarders. As a traveling salesman, he is both an intermediary and an outsider, embodying the





complexities of African American dependency on white economic structures for survival. His interactions with the residents reveal their aspirations for economic independence and social equity, emphasizing the interplay between race and economics.

Each character's aspirations are interwoven with the historical context of their lives, marked by hopes for personal and collective redemption amidst the backdrop of systemic racism and social injustice. Their struggles reflect not only individual hardships but also the broader African American experience during the early 1900s. In essence, the characters of "Joe Turner's Come and Gone" serve as a microcosm of the African American struggle for identity, autonomy, and community in a society that systematically devalues their existence.

As their stories unfold, they reveal the profound impact of historical trauma while also illuminating the universality of human aspiration—each character embodying the quest for their own voice and place within a world rife with challenges. This exploration of personal struggle amidst a shared community underscores the power of collective resilience, illustrating that while the characters face individual obstacles, they are ultimately bound together by their shared history and aspirations.

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### 3. Chapter 3: The Significance of the Boarding House in the Community

In "Joe Turner's Come and Gone," the boarding house stands as a microcosm of the African American experience in early 20th-century America. Nestled in the heart of Pittsburgh, the boarding house run by the matriarchal character, Martha Pentecost, is not merely a place of temporary residence; it serves as a vital social hub for the African American community, reflecting their struggles, aspirations, and resilience.

The boarding house, known as "The Lodge," becomes a sanctuary for men and women grappling with the harsh realities of their lives. In an era defined by racism, economic hardships, and the aftershocks of slavery, this communal space allows for a semblance of normalcy and belonging. For many characters, it symbolizes a stop along their journey—an intermediary space where they can transition from the traumatic past of their oppression to a potential future defined by self-determination and identity.

Each tenant brings their unique narrative, contributing to a collective story that illustrates the broader African American experience. For instance, the arrival of Herald Loomis, a man haunted by his past captivity, highlights the psychological scars left by a history of servitude and oppression. The boarding house becomes a place where Loomis can confront his past, connect with others who share similar struggles, and ultimately seek



redemption and reconciliation. The significance of this communal space is further emphasized through the interactions among the tenants, which reveal their various coping mechanisms, hopes, and despairs.

Moreover, the boarding house fosters a sense of community and support that is crucial for the characters' development. Martha Pentecost embodies the nurturing force of this environment. Her role transcends that of a mere landlady; she acts as a maternal figure who provides not only shelter but also guidance and emotional sustenance. Through her character, Wilson illustrates the importance of female figures in African American communities, who often serve as the backbone, ensuring that bonds are maintained and individuals receive the encouragement to rise above their circumstances.

The communal interactions often present moments filled with levity, music, and storytelling, reinforcing the idea that shared experiences can foster resilience. Music, a recurring motif in the play, often resonates within the walls of the boarding house, serving as a form of expression and a means of cultural preservation. For instance, the presence of characters like Bynum Walker, who engages in spiritual and ancestral practices, exemplifies how the boarding house becomes a site of cultural expression, where traditions are upheld and the spirits of the past are invoked.



However, the boarding house is also emblematic of the limitations placed on African Americans during this era. Although it offers safety and a sense of belonging, it can also reflect the transient nature of their existence. Many tenants ultimately leave seeking better opportunities, symbolizing the broader quest for self-actualization amidst systemic barriers. Through these departures, Wilson underscores the idea that while the boarding house provides refuge, it cannot entirely shield its occupants from the difficulties of the outside world.

In conclusion, the significance of the boarding house in "Joe Turner's Come and Gone" lies in its dual role as a sanctuary for healing and a reminder of the struggles faced by African Americans in the early 20th century. It encapsulates the vibrancy of community life while highlighting the individual journeys towards self-discovery and identity amidst historical constraints. As such, it serves as an essential backdrop for understanding the characters' development and their relentless pursuit of hope and renewal in a challenging world.

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## 4. Chapter 4: The Journey of Self-Discovery and Identity among the Characters

In August Wilson's "Joe Turner's Come and Gone," the themes of self-discovery and identity are intricately woven into the fabric of the characters' lives, highlighting their journeys through the complexities of the African American experience in early 20th century America. Set in a boarding house in Pittsburgh, the narrative unfolds against a backdrop of personal and collective struggles for identity, as characters confront their pasts, grapple with their present circumstances, and seek paths toward future fulfillment.

### \*\*Lymon and the Search for Identity\*\*

One of the most profound journeys of self-discovery is that of Herald Loomis. The play centers on Loomis, a man recently released from the confines of Joe Turner's labor camp, who arrives at the boarding house burdened not only by the trauma of his past but also by the lingering estrangement from his own identity. Initially, Loomis is caught between the remnants of his former self—represented by the pain of his separation from his wife, Zonia, and his experiences in captivity—and the hope of rediscovering who he truly is. This internal conflict is compounded by his struggle to interpret the dreams that haunt his nights, which function as a means of connection with his ancestral roots and personal history. Loomis's journey is reflective of a wider struggle among African Americans of the



time, who sought to reclaim their identities amid the legacy of slavery and systemic oppression.

### **\*\*Berea's Quest for Connection\*\***

In parallel, we see the character of Mattie Campbell, who, through her relationships in the boarding house, seeks affirmation of her own identity and worth. She yearns for recognition and a sense of belonging, navigating her journey as she comes to terms with the sacrifices and decisions she has made. Her interactions with the male characters, particularly her complex relationship with Loomis, illustrate the societal expectations placed on women, especially African American women, who often bear the burden of both maintaining family ties and pursuing individual aspirations. Mattie's journey underscores the conflict between societal roles and personal desire, a duality faced by many women of the era.

### **\*\*Seth and the Challenge of Heritage\*\***

Seth Holly, the owner of the boarding house, also embodies the struggle for identity as a businessman and a member of the black community. He represents a bridge between the old traditions and the new aspirations of African Americans in a post-slavery society. Seth's attempts to cultivate a reputable environment reflect his desire to establish a sense of pride and identity within the community, although this endeavor is challenged by the harsh realities of economic struggle and personal ambition. He grapples with



the expectations placed upon him, not only as an individual but also as a representative of a larger narrative of resilience in the African American community.

### **\*\*The Rotating Characters and Their Impact\*\***

The lives of the other residents in the boarding house further enrich this exploration of identity. Characters such as Bynum Walker and Jeremy demonstrate diverse interpretations of self-discovery. Bynum, the self-styled "binder of men," finds purpose in his spiritual journey, which is rooted in the tradition of his ancestors. His interactions with Loomis and others offer insights into the concept of heritage and the importance of understanding one's roots in the journey of self-identification. For Jeremy, his desire to connect with others and build relationships speaks to the universal need for belonging, emphasizing that identity is often shaped through communal ties and shared experiences.

### **\*\*Conclusion\*\***

The journey of self-discovery and identity among the characters in "Joe Turner's Come and Gone" illustrates the complexities of navigating one's sense of self within a societal framework laden with historical baggage. Each character embodies a unique struggle, emphasizing that the search for identity is not a solitary endeavor but a communal experience intertwined with personal history, societal expectations, and a profound quest for



understanding one's place in the world. Through their stories, Wilson crafts a narrative of resilience, suggesting that the journey of self-discovery is ongoing and deeply influenced by the legacies of the past that shape the present.

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## 5. Chapter 5: The Concluding Reflections on Heritage, Hope, and Renewal

In August Wilson's "Joe Turner's Come and Gone," the themes of heritage, hope, and renewal are woven intricately into the lives of the characters, particularly against the backdrop of an oppressive social context that African Americans faced in the early 20th century. The play's conclusion serves as a powerful reflection on how the struggles and aspirations of the characters encapsulate broader themes of identity and resilience, ultimately illustrating the enduring spirit of the African American community.

Throughout the play, the significance of heritage is highlighted as the characters grapple with their past while seeking their future. Bynum Walker, the self-proclaimed 'root worker,' embodies the connection to ancestry and cultural identity. His belief in the importance of lineage and spiritual roots reflects the broader African American struggle to reclaim identity in a society that has often sought to erase it. The character's rituals and his search for the 'Shine' symbolize a yearning for connection to a heritage that has been disrupted by the effects of slavery and systemic racism. For Bynum, the journey of self-discovery is deeply tied to understanding where he comes from. The play posits that heritage is not just a relic of the past but a source of strength that can be drawn upon to navigate an uncertain future.

Hope emerges as another prevalent theme in the concluding reflections of



the narrative. The characters in the boarding house each represent the hopes and aspirations of the African American community during a time of turbulence. Herald Loomis, a pivotal character, encapsulates the struggle between despair and hope as he seeks to overcome the traumas inflicted upon him by a history of oppression. His journey leads him to understand that despite the overwhelming obstacles, hope can take many forms—be it through community connection, love, or a sense of belonging. The transformation Loomis undergoes exemplifies the notion that hope is a powerful catalyst for change, enabling individuals to rise above their circumstances and work towards a better future.

Renewal, as a theme in this chapter, indicates the potential for personal and communal transformation. The boarding house itself, while a space marked by confinement and limitation, also serves as a sanctuary of renewal. It is within these walls that characters confront their realities, articulate their desires, and start to forge paths toward self-actualization. The interactions among the residents illustrate the idea that connecting with others who share similar struggles can ignite a collective spirit of renewal. For instance, as characters recount their stories and support one another's goals, they foster an environment that encourages the emergence of new identities and aspirations. Through their engagements, the narrative conveys that renewal often arises from grappling with one's past, acknowledging it, and moving forward with the collective strength of the community.



The conclusion of the play leaves audiences with a profound reflection on the resilience inherent in the African American experience. The characters do not merely seek to escape their circumstances; instead, they aspire to redefine them. As hope intertwines with heritage and the promise of renewal, Wilson subtly suggests that while the path may be fraught with challenges, the potential for growth and transformation is ever-present. The play ultimately uplifts the notion that the future can be influenced by the past—where collective memory of struggle gives way to a renewed sense of purpose and identity.

In summation, the concluding reflections on heritage, hope, and renewal in "Joe Turner's Come and Gone" underscore a message of perseverance. Through the lens of its characters' journeys, Wilson highlights the integral role that recognizing one's past plays in fostering hope for the future, thereby affirming the enduring nature of the human spirit in confronting adversity.

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