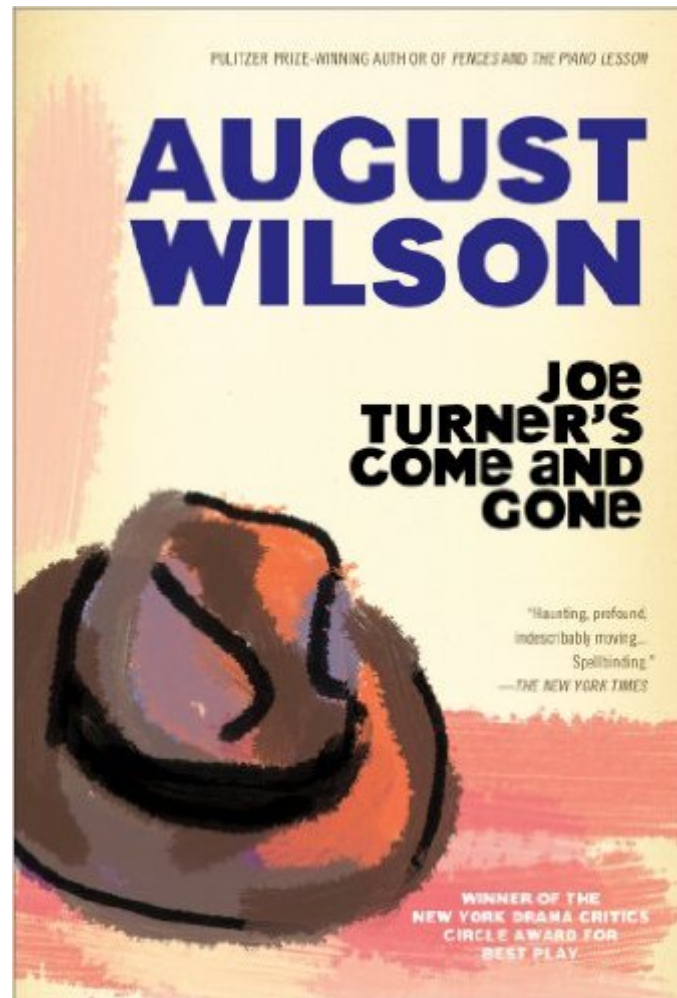


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# Joe Turner's Come And Gone



## Synopsis

From the Pulitzer Prize winning playwright of *Fences* and *The Piano Lesson*—the glow accompanying August Wilson's place in contemporary American theater is fixed. • Toni Morrison—When Harold Loomis arrives at a black Pittsburgh boardinghouse after seven years' impressed labor on Joe Turner's chain gang, he is a free man—in body. But the scars of his enslavement and a sense of inescapable alienation oppress his spirit still, and the seemingly hospitable rooming house seethes with tension and distrust in the presence of this tormented stranger. Loomis is looking for the wife he left behind, believing that she can help him reclaim his old identity. But through his encounters with the other residents he begins to realize that what he really seeks is his rightful place in a new world—and it will take more than the skill of the local "People Finder" to discover it. This jazz-influenced drama is a moving narrative of African-American experience in the 20th century.

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## Customer Reviews

The title "Joe Turner's Come & Gone" symbolizes the American socialized system of oppression. Joe Turner is "the Man", Joe Turner is jail, and oppression. In this play, Herald Loomis has been detained by Joe Turner for seven years. Upon his release he searches to find his daughter and his wife while all along he has been searching for his inner self. Bynum Walker is a "Rootworker", one who practices unconventional spiritual worship. He lives in the boarding house and tells a story of a shiny man who has the secret of life. This secret that he refers to, the secret of life, symbolizes the

meaning of all in existence and most importantly the knowledge of self. Joe Turner, "the Man", "the system", and American society have stripped, robbed, and raped the African American of self. It is this quest for identity that Herald Loomis searches for within himself. This same quest is also found in all of the other characters in the play as well. Those that come to the boarding house are unstable and have not found their true selves. Even Seth and Bertha, the owners of the house also quest for their identity. They have a better financial system than the others, but they are still timid when they encounter white America. Seth constantly states the rules of the boarding house. He proclaims to operate a clean, safe, and respectful house. He feels that any other behavior would call too much attention to him and his home. Resulting in white American society to take oppressive actions against his achievements. Joe Turner's *Come & Gone* is an excellent concept that spiritually looks at the concept of knowing oneself. August Wilson's use of quest for identity among all his characters allows the reader to unmistakably find a connection with their own secret song to sing.

August Wilson, a Pulitzer-Prize winning playwright captures the essence of the African-American experience of slavery, migration, and the quest for an identity. These themes are part of the written slave narrative, from which the African-American literary tradition was born. In "Joe Turner's *Come and Gone*", Wilson brings the struggle of migration from the agricultural South to the Industrial North to light; set in the early 1900's when this great migration had just begun. The quest for self/an identity is one of the many scarring ramifications of slavery, and the result of namelessness. Wilson, is able to capture this central theme through religion, allegory, and music-Jazz/Blues. The quest for one's identity is rooted in the metaphorical use of the quest for a song. Songs mean different things for different people; they touch people in different ways. Why? Because each individual is unique, each individual has a song, an identity. With the historical culture of the African-American, and its connection to Music, this collaboration of rhythms and imagery proliferate the importance of this quest to life. Wilson, like Toni Morrison, offers his work as an illustration of the Blues Theory of Art-the idea that music has the ability to reach deep into the soul, and pull from it the raw feelings that may otherwise be unreachable. Music goes to the core of one's being, and helps the healing process. With Loomis, this was evident in the search for his song, his identity, it was all part of the restorative process, yet a consequence of America's greatest shame-Slavery. I must say that "Joe Turner's *Come and Gone*" in a wonderful way, using symbolism, folklore, and like Jazz, a non-written form of art, serves as an anchor and captures the heart of the African-American experience.

Wilson's play is set in the early 1920's in Pittsburgh. The play is about blacks migrating North and away from slave states towards better, or different opportunity. The action takes place in two acts at boarding house owned by Seth and his wife Bertha. The husband and wife duo have several guest who come and go each with a different story, or "song." The play has a jazz influence that makes the story line flow like a musical. Music and dance are the major form of communication for blacks and Wilson uses this mode of communication effectively throughout the play to bring his characters to life. Each person who encounters the boarding house of Seth and his wife are in search of their song, which is a synonym for their identity. The characters search for their song by trying to locate others through Selig, the people finder. The song symbolizes an identity that has been lost within years of slavery and continuing discrimination. The play shows us that a person's song is within and can never be found in the hands of someone else. Our song is inside of us. We are not to search for others or look for others to define ourselves. The search needs to begin within. This play was very magical in that it transformed music into a body. Two thumbs up!

Wilson's vision of African Americans in the 1910s. The set is a boarding house in Pittsburgh. Assorted characters arrive and leave the boarding house, but Joe Turner is not one of them. The owner of the boarding house is suspicious of his boarders, but he wants to make money. Some of the characters are ex-slaves, others, progeny of ex-slaves--all living in Jim Crow America. One young man has escaped chain gangs in the South. Loomis (the protagonist) arrives with his daughter--they are looking for his runaway wife. Wilson gives this play a more African ambiance with witch doctor incantations and rituals and juba dancing and singing. Late in the play we learn that Joe Turner is not a character in the play, but a character in a song "Joe Turner's Come and Gone." Joe Turner is the fugitive-slave catcher of antebellum days--a symbol of the white man's oppression. The message of the play: fellows, let go of the past; it's over. Don't fear the white man; better days are coming, so find your song and live it.

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