



The Men of Brewster Place: A Novel

By Gloria Naylor

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Naylor returns to the fictional neighborhood, this time focusing on the men behind the women who inhabited that desolate block of row houses, telling their tragic, sad, funny, and heroic stories.

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The Men of Brewster Place: A Novel By Gloria Naylor Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Gloria Naylor revisits the dilapidated brick walls, sagging ceilings, and decrepit plumbing of Brewster Place, a feeble fortress that jealously guards the hell, heartache, and hope of its tenants. Ben, the kind, alcoholic janitor from *The Women of Brewster Place* returns as a mythical minstrel of sorts, wandering in and out of the lives of Brewster's male denizens, introducing their stories, each a quest for the meaning of *manhood*.

For autistic Brother Jerome, masculine identity comes in the form of a rickety upright piano whose missing keys and wobbly wires burst to life when he plays. Jerome plays so well (better than Count Basie, mind you) that his hedonistic mother decides not to institutionalize him so she can charge for his performances. Eugene, however, has a more difficult act to shore: he's married, he's a father, and he's gay. Ceil, his wife, doesn't know that's why he keeps leaving, so she takes family matters into her own hands and sends Eugene into a bottomless pit of guilt and self-loathing. Basil looks for his redemption in a contemptuous trash bag named Keisha and her two beautiful, neglected sons, Jason and Eddie. Will Basil find atonement for his sins against his mother if he gives those boys what he never received as a child? The men of Brewster Place continue to stream into the story in raw, biting vignettes until the stage is full and the future of their community is threatened. Can these men come together and reclaim what's theirs? The answer lies at the root of self-worth and sexual identity. Or, in the words of Ben, "Brewster Place is a small street but it seems there's an endless supply of I coulda, I shoulda, but didn't. Can you call it any man's blues? I don't know, but you can definitely call it the black man's blues." --Rebekah Warren

From Library Journal

As narrated by Joe Morton, everyone has a story to tell on Brewster Place and Naylor eloquently gives voice to the people who live there. Fifteen years ago we heard the women of that byway (*The Women of Brewster Place*, Audio Reviews, LJ 5/1/94 and LJ 11/15/93); now we hear from the men. Brewster Place is not an address to which people aspire yet it is not quite an address for people of despair. Sure, they've seen better times in the past and just maybe they'll see better times in the future. Meanwhile, they're getting by from day to day. Morton brings each of the characters to life: Ben, the neighborhood janitor, who serves as the chorus; Brother Jerome, the musical genius with his child's mind; Basil, who wants a family so badly that he makes the wrong choices; Rev. Moreland T. Woods, who wants a new church to glorify himself; and the others who gather at the barber shop to comment on the general state of the world. This is great storytelling and a good choice for public library collections. --Ann Blaine Hilyard, Lake Villa Dist. Lib., IL

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From [Booklist](#)

Naylor's first novel, *The Women of Brewster Place* (1982), a set of seven portraits of women living in a tenement on a dead-end street, galvanized readers with its clarity of voice and unflinching realism and compassion, qualities that inspired the production of a television movie and a weekly series. Here Naylor returns to Brewster Place to catch up with its male denizens, several of whom were boys in the earlier book. Apparently eager for continuity, Naylor has taken the liberty of resurrecting Ben, the hard-drinking, all-seeing, and reticent super who served as master of ceremonies in the first book until his death, and he is, by far, the most eloquent and evocative of the Brewster men. The tremendous psychological insights that made the women of Brewster Place so real is sadly lacking in the majority of Naylor's male protagonists, who range from a married man and father struggling with the realization that he's gay to a fancy-man reverend with political ambitions, a gangbanger, a man who marries a woman he detests to be a father to her sons, and a playwright. These characters remain flat, and their stories are cautionary tales, intriguing in terms of the

issues they raise yet a touch too facile and melodramatic. But there are flashes of genuine insight, tragedy, and great warmth, and one can easily imagine the lively book-club discussions that this book will spark.

Donna Seaman

Users Review

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Harry Anderson:

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