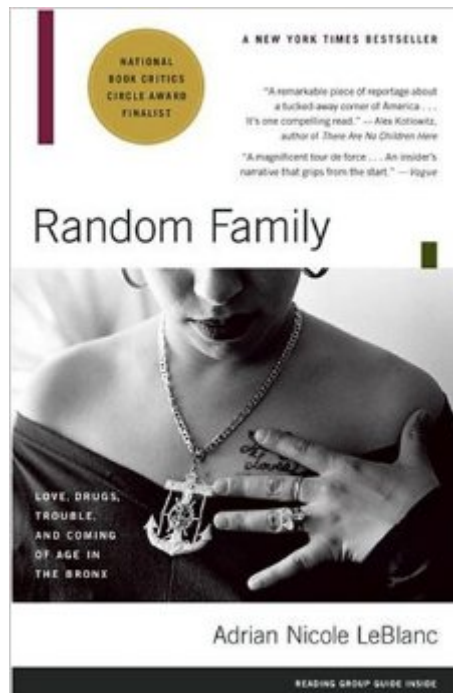


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Random Family: Love, Drugs, Trouble, And Coming Of Age In The Bronx



Synopsis

This New York Times bestseller intimately depicts urban life in a gripping book that slips behind cold statistics and sensationalism to reveal the true sagas lurking behind the headlines of gangsta glamour. In her extraordinary bestseller, Adrian Nicole LeBlanc immerses readers in the intricacies of the ghetto, revealing the true sagas lurking behind the headlines of gangsta glamour, gold-drenched drug dealers, and street-corner society. Focusing on two romances—Jessica's dizzying infatuation with a hugely successful young heroin dealer, Boy George, and Coco's first love with Jessica's little brother, Cesar—Random Family is the story of young people trying to outrun their destinies. Jessica and Boy George ride the wild adventure between riches and ruin, while Coco and Cesar stick closer to the street, all four caught in a precarious dance between survival and death. Friends get murdered; the DEA and FBI investigate Boy George; Cesar becomes a fugitive; Jessica and Coco endure homelessness, betrayal, the heartbreaking separation of prison, and, throughout it all, the insidious damage of poverty. Charting the tumultuous cycle of the generations—as girls become mothers, boys become criminals, and hope struggles against deprivation—LeBlanc slips behind the cold statistics and sensationalism and comes back with a riveting, haunting, and true story.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is an amazing and all-consuming story. LeBlanc transports the reader into an extended family in the Bronx. She recounts the relationships, the fights, the betrayals, the drugs, the crime, the unintentional pregnancies, the jail time, and much more for her intertwined cast of characters.

Everything is presented as is--the only reflection on the characters' motivation is their own. LeBlanc does not try to extrapolate from their experiences or impart her own beliefs on the reader. The reader is left to draw his or her own conclusions from the interactions they read about. It's easy enough to say women in the ghetto need to start using contraceptions and get off their butts and get jobs. I learned through the people in this book that life is much more complicated than that. Children aren't afforded learning opportunities because their parents are using drugs and having unsavory characters around. No one wakes the teenaged girls up to tell them about pregnancy. The girls have no sense of self worth and want to have children to force the fathers of their kids to love them. Every woman in here was once sexually abused, so responsible mothers can't leave their children with friends or family members who have random people traipsing through the house, and that prevents them from getting jobs and getting out of the house. This book comes full-circle with the story of one Bronx family. It opens with Jessica, pregnant at age 16. It ends 16 years later with Jessica's daughter Serena ready to get in as much trouble as her mother did at that age, despite the major strides Jessica has made at becoming a functioning member of society. LeBlanc's dedication to her task--combing through trial records, wiretaps, police reports, child welfare reports, and conducting years of interviews--has really paid off in this compelling narrative.

I grew up in one of the neighborhoods portrayed in this book, and while I believe the author has accurately described Jessica, Coco and their friends and relatives, these people are not representative of everyone who lives in the South Bronx. There are many, many people in these neighborhoods who shun the drug-dealing and thug lifestyle. These people work hard at low paying jobs (think doormen, porters, mailroom clerks, cashiers) and scrimp and save to send their children to Catholic school. They don't hang out on street corners and they don't allow their children to do so either. And they are the victims of people like Boy George and Cesar, they are the ones whose apartments are robbed, whose children are beaten on the way home from school, whose daughters are harassed. I hate the idea that middle-class white liberals are reading this book and getting some kind of voyeuristic thrill. I suspect they wouldn't be nearly as enthralled by a book that chronicled the lives of the people I've described above, the ones who try to live upstanding lives despite overwhelming poverty and the threats of the street.

This has to be one of the best books that I have ever read. LeBlanc grasped "it", the life, the city, the love or lack thereof, the lifestyle, the losses and the helplessness. I read this book like I would have an article in Rolling Stone, holding on to every word, wanting to know what happened next. I could

not put it down. It was a personal experience for me, having lived a portion of my life like the girls in Random Family. I must say that one of my frustrations has been that there are not enough of these kind of stories out there for us to read. This is the reality of our world, our social structure. Welfare is not a luxury, housing systems are not free living, not all criminals should remain prisoners. These are everyday people caught up in a cycle, a family cycle, generation to generation. These are our neighbors, the woman at the supermarket, the girl at the doctors office, just random people. And this book is just about that, a random family. There are so many families like this, torn apart, looking for the love that so often is mistaken for money, sex or a drug. I would recommend this book to anyone who asked. I believe that Ms. LeBlanc will be one of the greatest journalists of all time. I am so impressed with her writing and her willingness to study her subjects, living in less than acceptable accommodations, dedicating herself and her life to the research, becoming apart of their families. I consider this book one of the best, I hope that you will too.

My interest in Adrian Nicole LeBlanc's new book was sparked by the excerpt from it that I read in the New York Times Magazine a few weeks ago. Her simple writing style and unsentimental look at the hard lives that "Lolli" and "Toney" have led since the mid-1980s appealed to me, and I decided that I had to buy Random Family when it came out. Having bought it today, I can testify that this book is no disappointment. Poignant and emotional, it succeeds in offering a glimpse into the lives of individuals growing up in a poverty stricken and dangerous Bronx while still emphasizing the importance of family life and the dependance on community that is so prevalent there. LeBlanc also paints a striking picture of family life in the ghetto and how it is affected by crime and the consequences that accompany it. If you are interested in learning more about the struggles and sacrifices of families whose stories are not often heard, this book is for you. I highly recommend it.

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