

Choice Reads: A Book-of-the-Month Club

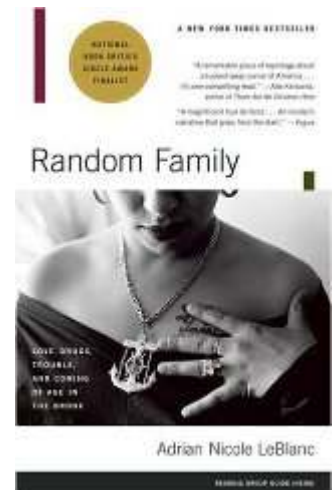
NOVEMBER 2008:

Random Family: Love, Drugs, Trouble, and Coming of Age in the Bronx

by Adrian Nicole LeBlanc

Description:

Journalist LeBlanc spent more than 10 years following two Latina women from the Bronx, and in this ambitious work, she tells their stories, beginning in the late 1980s with their young teen years. Older Jessica becomes a mistress to an enormously successful heroin dealer, and Coco falls for Jessica's brother, an aspiring gangster. The two women find love, weather abuse, have babies, endure their own and their partners' prison terms, and struggle with health problems, social systems, motherhood, their own mothers, the violence of their communities, and the uncertain future. LeBlanc's prose is sprawling and dense with cinematic detail. What emerges is an important, unvarnished portrait of people living in deep urban poverty, beyond the statistics, hip-hop glamour, and stereotypes.



Reader's Guide:

1. In what ways did class status affect the young men and women in *Random Family*? What roles did economic poverty and poor education play in causing girls and boys to become mothers and fathers?
2. Neither Coco nor Jessica had strong parental influences. Their fathers were absent and their mothers often prioritized drugs, other men, and partying, before their children. How did the lack of parental guidance lead the two young women to enter unwed, teenage motherhood? If Coco and Jessica had responsible models to follow, might they have escaped bearing two, three, five children?
3. Motherhood seemed to give both Coco and Jessica, and other female protagonists in *Random Family*, a sense of power, pride, and security. How did having a child give each of these young women an "important role," or a higher status? How did becoming a mother give these young women a sense of purpose?
4. Contraception and abortion were basically non-existent options in *Random Family*. The few times Coco considered visiting Planned Parenthood, she couldn't find the time or she backed out at the last minute. When Jessica was impregnated by a prison guard, abortion was never suggested and Jessica never pursued. Why do you think both women had such limited access to contraception? Did they actively choose to not seek contraception, or were they ignorant about their options?
5. Towards the end of *Random Family*, Coco and Jessica's eldest daughters, Mercedes and Serena respectively, seemed to be going down the same paths as their mothers. Although Mercedes and Serena witnessed daily the stressful and limiting outcomes of teenage pregnancy, they seem destined to repeat the same mistakes. Why? What is LeBlanc suggesting about the inability to escape poverty?

If you would like to recommend a book, receive book suggestions directly, or meet to discuss books, please contact Pem at pem@prochoicemass.org or 617-556-8800 x14.

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