



Blanche Cleans Up: A Blanche White Mystery #3

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Blanche White is a very black, middle-aged woman who cleans white people's houses for a living. Tart-tongued and shrewd, with a keen nose for trouble, she's also a queen-sized snoop - who sees at a glance what people are really up to - especially if it's criminal. It's been three years since she had to grab the kids and scurry out of Farleigh, North Carolina. Now they've all settled into life in the Roxbury section of Boston, and Blanche herself is feeling like she may finally be free to enjoy life - at least a little. But before Blanche can say, "Breakfast is ready," she gets suckered into standing in as cook-housekeeper to one Allister Brindle, a Boston Brahmin politician, and his do-gooder wife. Blanche is quickly enmeshed in a festering canker of a scandal that moves from the Brindles' house (a.k.a. Prozac House) to her own black community as she tries to figure out the truth behind the swimming-pool death of a young black man who knew a little too much...

Blanche Cleans Up: A Blanche White Mystery #3 Details

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From Reader Review Blanche Cleans Up: A Blanche White Mystery #3 for online ebook

Nancy says

I am such a fan of Barbara Neely's series that I am afraid I can't consider this an unbiased review.

We may not be talking serious literature here, but we are talking about a very entertaining novel that is well-written, but also thought provoking. For me, the strength of "the Blanche novels" is that they address social issues throughout the book. Race and class are not just a sub-text, they are central to who Blanche is and how she faces the world. I have found each of the three books I've read both stimulating and cause for reflection about who we are and how we look at (and treat) others.

I am not 100% sure I would like Blanche working in my home (she is a domestic): she listens at doors, snoops in drawers, and asks many probing questions of the other staff and/or service providers to the household. But, I sure would want Blanche for a friend. She is smart, loyal and determined. There is not a doubt that her good qualities far outweigh her bad ones, but I still would prefer her not to be too involved in MY business.

It is quite a gift to be able to entertain and educate at the same time and Barbara Neely does that for me in every book. Well done, and Viva! Blanche.

Tlovesbooks says

Ok. I love a good murder mystery. I actually went through an Agatha Christie phase in middle school. This book begins a series of mysteries where a local cleaning woman, Blanche White, has to navigate through social expectations and others indiscretions to get to the truth about the murder of African American man in this small town.

Blanche is smart, sassy and skilled as unassuming investigator. Love the book and the series. I have been patiently waiting more installments for years:(

Hadenmaiden says

Blanche is a middle aged lady with attitude.

She is bringing up her sister's two children on her own, living away from her home town, and her mother, but with lots of friends in the local community.

This book is a murder mystery - with a difference. Blanche is standing in for her friend Miz Inez, who needs to take time away from her regular job, so Blanche ends up housekeeping for a wealthy local family. Whilst Miz Inez is away, her son dies (or is murdered, we don't know for a while) and Blanche ends up investigating. Her teenage adoptive so. Is involved with a local investigation into lead poisoning, and as the narrative progresses, it becomes clear that there are links between these two aspects of the story.

At first, I didn't find this an easy read, being quite far removed from my usual books, but it grew on me, and I ended up really enjoying it. The chapters each deal with a different day of the investigation, so sixteen chapters, sixteen days worth of events. There's a bit of all sorts in here - more than one murder, corruption,

homophobia, challenging societal expectations, passion, loss, abuse.....

There are some engaging characters, and some obnoxious ones.

The ending isn't the one you would expect from a murder mystery - you'll have to read it to find out, though!

Thank you to the publishers, Brash Books, who sent me an advance copy for review.

Kaethe says

I could really go for some time with Blanche right now.

CaseyTheCanadianLesbrarian says

I can't even describe how awesome this book was! It totally exceeded my high expectations. Characterization was incredible--from the smart, feisty, flawed, observant sleuth Blanche to every single side character. The novel is full of everyday wisdoms and observations about humanity and life on this earth, not to mention realistic, astute commentary about being black in the US, class, sex work, homophobia, abortion, environmentalism, domestic work, and other issues weaved seamlessly and effortlessly into the detective plot which was also greatly entertaining and had just the right amount of twists. There was not one moment that I did not love reading this book. Did I mention it's also really funny? Do yourself a favour, and even if you're not a regular mystery reader, find one of the Blanche White books (irony in the name intended) and read it asap.

Judy says

easy reading. lots of good social issues from a black person's perspective; race, class, politics. will read more of Neely's books. great interview with her on you tube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=62wGF...>

Trish says

Barbara Neely only wrote four Blanche books, but each one addresses issues central to life in America, and highlights the effect of these issues on the lives of America's black folk. Blanche White, name notwithstanding, is a large woman with skin "on the extreme edge of blackness" and works as a "domestic." If you ever wanted to know what your maid or cook was thinking when they answered "Yes, Ma'm" with eyes cut off to the side, you're going to get your chance here. This woman is going to surprise and delight you. She has smarts and attitude to burn, and she has got three teens to take care of--so don't waste her time, sit down, and let her tell you how it plays.

Blanche struggles to navigate a dangerous world that doesn't concern itself with her needs or those of her family. She is an amateur sleuth, which gives her plenty of latitude to indulge her curiosity about other people's lives. She is wily, but she is also strong and salty, blunt and clear. She is funny. She is an indispensable guide to looking at and discussing critical matters of concern to all Americans with regard to issues of race and class in our racially diverse neighborhoods. Neely chooses important social issues and has big black Blanche tell us all about sensitive issues she faces every day.

The Blanche novels are classified as mystery, but the murders are not the most interesting thing about this series. In this novel, what pins us to the page is what Blanche thinks about as she goes about her day as a cook in the household of a wealthy Boston couple, one of whom has put in his bid to be governor. There is plenty of intrigue surrounding the death of two young black men who used to work at the house, and then there is the death of a woman famous in her Roxbury neighborhood for knowing everything about everyone. The mystery "who-done-it" is a vehicle for Blanche to air her concerns.

Those concerns include protecting her family from the corrosion of bad influences, either from the sense of entitlement white and/or wealthy people have as a birthright, but also from the bottom-feeders in her own mostly black neighborhood. There is plenty of danger everywhere—from lead poisoning, for instance—and Blanche has got her hands full keeping body and soul together *and* caring for three teens. What struck me about the murders is that though two young black men and a black woman are killed, the official investigations never came close to discovering the culprit(s). Blanche did her own investigations but never considered bringing what she learned to the police. Eventually the culprits were brought down by wrongdoing in another arena.

Blanche has a refreshing intellectual honesty. She feels jealousy, rage, hurt, but she works it out on the page, expressing feelings we've all had, and working it around until she admits she may have gone too far, or should be less possessive, or that she can't control what other people think or decide to do. She also expresses feelings of love, lust, and tenderness and can tell the difference between them.

“She’d stopped expecting life to be fair when she was about eight years old and had yet to be proven wrong. Still, that didn’t mean she couldn’t try to even things out a bit.”

The Blanche books were originally published by Penguin Books in the 1990s, and are now being reissued in ebook format by Brash Books. The third book in the series is just out in Kindle format with the fourth due in August this year. Those who want to be reacquainted with the smart and salty tongue of Blanche in Boston need wait no longer but can start reading today.

Author Barbara Neely has a Masters degree in Urban and Regional Planning from the University of Pittsburgh and set up a community-based housing program for female felons in an area of Pittsburgh called Shady Side. She knows all about poor choices and failures of will. She knows what despair looks like. Somehow she keeps her sense of humor, and shares it with us in the Blanche books.

Diana Reese writing for *The Washington Post* published a review of the Blanche books and portions of an interview with Barbara Neely in January 2015. And the U.S. Embassy in Prague conducted a video interview of Barbara Neely on the occasion of the books being translated into Czech by high schoolers. The covers of those translations are especially fabulous.

Udeni says

This is the third of the Blanche White detective series of books, and the first where all the fictional elements (plot, character, dialogue, pacing) all come together. Blanche has moved to Boston with her two teenage charges, and is struggling to bring them up safely in an inner-city neighbourhood. She is working at a politician's mansion when murder strikes. Blanche is quickly drawn into a plot involving blackmail, sex scandals, and her own life is soon in danger.

Neely hits her stride in this book: the tension is slowly ratcheted up, the action sequences are breathtaking, and the multiple plot strands are seamlessly combined. As always, social issues are deftly illustrated: sexism

in the black church, teenage pregnancy, vigilante justice, political corruption. One of my great pleasures in the Blanche series is how Blanche deliberately annoys her racist employers, and then stands back to watch the results:

"Blanche had never seen anyone's eyes get bloodshot while she watched. Could she make him froth at the mouth next?"

She is undaunted by the racism and sexism she endures, and lives life with humour, tolerance, and energy. Blanche is one of my favourite fictional creations. I would gladly sit down for a gin and tonic with Ms White.

Thank you Trish for bringing the Blanche series to my attention. I'm tempted to start stalking Barbara Neely to find out when, or if, the next Blanche book will emerge.

Leslie Reese says

Blanche doesn't necessarily solve mysteries as much as she has a lot of responsibilities and her hand in a lot of pots; is highly-opinionated, and nosy! I think I would have enjoyed this book even more had it (1)a shorter roster of characters, (2)a shorter list of murders, (3)a bit less sleaze, (4)fewer ends to tie up at the end, and (5)a smidge less "sassiness" on Blanche's part. A very entertaining read. I read **Blanche on the Lam** back in the 1990s, but I don't remember her character being as "extra" as she seems to be in this novel. Who knows? Maybe *I'm* the one who's changed?.

Ivonne Rovira says

Who could blame Blanche White for assuming that filling in for a week as a cook-housekeeper as a favor to someone would be easy? After all, Miz Inez, who normally had the gig at the stately Brindle mansion, didn't usually have a strenuous job. However, Blanche hadn't counted on blueblood Allister Brindle's campaign for governor of Massachusetts. Or on the disappearance of Allister's estranged son, Marc. Or on the mysterious death of Miz Inez's son Ray-Ray just a few days into the temporary job — with more deaths to come.

At the request of an old lady, Blanche promises to find out who killed the handsome, self-assured Ray-Ray. She begins to connect the disparate clues — and to realize that she and the niece and nephew she's raising as her own are in serious danger.

Blanche Cleans Up has less of a social message than Barbara Neely's first two novels, *Blanche on the Lam* and *Blanche Among the Talented Tenth*. While I miss Neely's straightforward voice on race relations in America — whether between the races or within the African-American community — *Blanche Cleans Up* brims over with so much suspense that readers won't be able to put it down. Special thanks to Brash Books for re-releasing this page-turner, just as fresh and riveting as when it was first published in 1998!

In the interest of full disclosure, I received this book from NetGalley and Brash Books in exchange for an honest review.

Lois says

This was exceptionally good. The mystery was actually decent and a bit more complicated than the previous 2 books-which was nice. Usually the mystery isn't that great it's the other aspects of the story that are. This books themes were crooked politicians period, uncle tom politicians, misuse of religion in politics, effects of lead paint, homosexuality in the black community as well as in US. Prostitution, a few of the ideas presented around this were dated and not ok. Otherwise these books continue to be extremely feminist and intersectional.

Clare O'Beara says

Blanche is a self-possessed and comfortably-figured housekeeper who works for an agency and goes in when another housekeeper is on vacation. At this time she enters a mansion where a wealthy white family lives; the husband is entering an election race. Blanche White, who is very black is used to being overlooked although it's hard to get the better of her. She notices while handing around canapés that the candidate is sucking up to established black leaders in the community rather than going to black neighbourhoods in Boston. But someone who provides a service to the household is found dead in an apparent burglary gone wrong. Blanche also spots a little blackmail going on and tries to keep uninvolved... but when a second death of a healthy young man occurs, she can't resist looking into the murder.

I found Blanche's straight-talking style refreshing and sardonic. Being Irish I was a little puzzled by her references to nappy hair (on black girls) because a nappy to us is what Americans call a diaper. I think it means curly hair.

I was interested by the references to lead in the water damaging the minds of poor children and by the assertion that kids in schools get Ritalin to keep them quiet. I've read the same about Britain; allegedly this drug is dispensed far too readily for a swift diagnosis of ADHD; kids never learn self-control so if they stop taking the drug, riots occur. At a public meeting where this is discussed, Blanche also sees an ex-con taking responsibility for his life and running a group that tries to stop returned prisoners from going back to jail, by using them to help keep kids out of trouble. But there's a rabble-rousing cleric of a strange sort, who has promised the political candidate to get the locals voting his way. Blanche has personal issues of a family nature and meets many older, gossiping locals. This is a story full of character and characters. Solving a murder is almost a side issue and excuse to meet the folks.

Strong language occasionally and some adult references.
I received an ARC for an unbiased review.

Shantel Clemons says

I received the ARC kindle edition of this book free from NetGalley in exchange for an honest review. Having read the first two books in this series, I have to say each book keeps getting better! Although the series is set in the 90's, the core issues of politics and race are still prevalent today. Blanche is a character that any woman should be able to identify with. This time around, Blanche is working a job for a friend while the friend takes a vacation. Who knew that the family she is working for had so much drama? Sure Blanche doesn't like to get involved with other people's family problems, but, when one person's actions pull her in to solve two murders, well all bets are off.

Deirdre says

I love the Blanche books. How often do you get a casual, easy-reading mystery told with a feminist, working-class, social justice, anti-racist perspective? I'd like to have a gin & tonic with Blanche.

Jennifer says

so enjoyable! neely once again delivers a story with heart, while dealing with important racial and social issues. the novel is engaging without ever feeling preachy, and i was particularly fond of the focus on families and community. blanche is such a strong protagonist - but she's flawed and self-aware which makes for a terrific combination of traits.
