



Palace Council

Stephen L. Carter

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“Carter twists plotlines like pretzels while wryly skewering America’s wealthy intellectual elite.” —*People*

John Grisham called Stephen L. Carter’s first novel, *The Emperor of Ocean Park*, “beautifully written and cleverly plotted. A rich, complex family saga, one deftly woven through a fine legal thriller.” The *Chicago Tribune* hailed Carter’s next book, *New England White*, as “a whodunit with conscience.” Now this best-selling novelist returns with an electrifying political thriller set in the turbulent era of Watergate and Vietnam, giving us one of the most riveting and naked portraits of Nixon ever written.

In the summer of 1952, twenty prominent men gather at a secret meeting on Martha’s Vineyard and devise a plot to manipulate the President of the United States. Soon after, the body of one of these men is found by Eddie Wesley, Harlem’s rising literary star. When Eddie’s younger sister mysteriously disappears, Eddie and the woman he loves, Aurelia Treene, are pulled into what becomes a twenty-year search for the truth. As Eddie and Aurelia uncover layer upon layer of intrigue, their odyssey takes them from the wealthy drawing rooms of New York through the shady corners of radical politics, all the way to the Oval Office.

Stephen Carter’s novel is as complex as it is suspenseful, and with his unique ability to turn stereotypes inside out, *Palace Council* is certain to enthrall readers to the very last page.

Palace Council Details

Date : Published July 8th 2008 by Knopf (first published January 1st 2008)

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Author : Stephen L. Carter

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From Reader Review Palace Council for online ebook

Dan Cotter says

Excellent book about the 1960s and Harlem. A political novel intertwined with race and family and a mysterious group. I have had his book on my shelves for some time and glad I pulled it to read it.

Bookmarks Magazine says

Oh critics, how ye disagree! Many found *Palace Council* overly long and complained that the "thriller" parts came and went at random. It's also a bad sign in a genre that depends on flash/bang finales if the ending is considered weak. On a separate note, Edward and Aurelia witness more historical events than Forrest Gump

Joe says

Palace Council is a big, sprawling, character driven novel. At its center is a vast conspiracy reaching into the Oval Office, threatening the social and political fabric of the country. The story spans over twenty years, from the early 1950's to the mid '70's. Our protagonist, writer Eddie Wesley, literally stumbles into this labyrinth of intrigue after discovering a dead body outside of a Harlem mansion.

Thus begins our story and Eddie's two decade long quest, first bouncing between DC and NYC and then onto Europe and Vietnam. Along the way Eddie meets such historical figures as J. Edgar Hoover, John F. Kennedy, Langston Hughes and Richard Nixon. All the while Eddie peels the proverbial onion, solving one riddle only to discover three more - The author seamlessly blending historical fact with fiction.

Because of personal reasons, which become evident in the reading, Eddie simply can't drop his pursuit of the truth, at whatever cost or however long it takes. And the puzzle's key is a long time in the finding, for Eddie's journey is paramount and drives the story.

I believe readers pick up this author's books expecting adrenaline spiking thrillers. They are not; the books are novels wrapped around complex puzzles. In Palace Council the reader is exposed to Harlem high society, Washington politics and the social upheaval of the 1960's, i.e. the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights movement. Through a vast number of well developed characters, the author digresses, pontificates and regales us with tales. There is family friction and a little romance. And although one may not find all of these characters or stories endearing, they are all compelling.

If you have a short attention span, this book isn't for you. On the other hand once captivated by this novel, it is difficult to put down.

Highly recommended.

Stefanie says

one word:
confusing

There are so many characters and the novel spans two decades. I found it really hard to follow and even at the end I wasn't exactly sure what had happened throughout the story. Also confusing was the fact that some of the "characters" are actual historical figures - Kennedy, Nixon, Langston Hughes, etc.

It was still ok, and interesting if you enjoy Carter's first two stories - some of the characters in his earlier novels are "born" during this one. I loved his first two novels but this one was not quite as good.

Nicky says

What a great summer read - a political thriller chock full of conspiracy theories and shady dealings, but told from the perspective of Harlem's upper crust in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. While I consider myself fairly well educated, being white and a native Iowan did not provide me with the best insight into African-American life during the mid-1900s. The world Carter describes is fascinating, and the characters are well-developed and intricate. So while he may be covering some old historical ground, the lens through which it's viewed is completely fresh, and probably long overdue (at least in the political thriller sense).

Despite a few shortcomings, the book does what good books are supposed to do - it compels you to turn the page, because you absolutely have to know what happens next.

Tirza Sanders says

I really like how smart Stephen Carter's books are. He combines mystery with history and explores upper class African American communities that are not widely written about. That said, I found this book a bit slow. It has such a large scope, spans several decades, and has many characters. I had a difficult time getting into the book and caring what happened to the characters. I have enjoyed other Carter books and really wanted to like it but I found it a challenge to finish.

Scott Rhee says

Another excellent mystery from Stephen L. Carter, "Palace Council" tells the story of the turbulent 1960s through the eyes of Eddie Wesley, a young black man from upper-class Harlem, and Aurelia Treene, Eddie's first and only love. On the night of her wedding (to another man), Eddie gets embarrassingly drunk and is booted from the reception. Stumbling through the park at night, he trips on the body of a well-known lawyer. Gripped in the man's hand is an inverted cross with a cryptic message engraved on it. Months later, and seemingly unrelated at first, Eddie's younger sister disappears without a trace. Thus begins a nearly 20-year-long investigation that leads Eddie to the highest levels of Washington, D.C. and the most dangerous war-

torn sections of Saigon. As the years go by, and Eddie's career as a writer flourishes, he inadvertently becomes entangled in the history of the United States, from the formation of militant groups such as the Black Panthers and the Weathermen, the assassinations of J.F.K., Bobby Kennedy, and Martin Luther King, the ripple effects of the Vietnam War, to the Watergate scandal. As always, Carter tells a well-plotted mystery, one that unravels slowly over time but always in unexpected directions.

Lobstergirl says

I want to weep with disgust that a book can be so banal, and so *long*. Reading it was mentally exhausting, and emotionally distressing, because it was so dull, and yet so complicated. It's a murder mystery, a political thriller, a missing persons quest, ranging from 1952 to 1975, among Harlem's black upper class. It has Dan Brown-like elements of conspiracy; riddles are solved with the help of passages from *Paradise Lost* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. The most annoying thing is Carter's insistence on incorporating every possible historical event into his narrative. Chappaquiddick - it's here. The characters are on Martha's Vineyard when it goes down. Watergate, Kent State, the moon landing, the Weather Underground bombing in Manhattan, the Attica prison riot, the Tet Offensive, the discovery of the oldest human remains in Kenya, political assassinations, they all happen here. Richard Nixon is implausibly friends with Eddie and Aurie, the two main characters. Eddie also writes speeches for JFK, and before that he was mentored by Langston Hughes; later, in Vietnam, he sees William Colby (CIA Chief of Station) limbering up for a tennis match. He pays a visit to Joseph P. Kennedy to solicit help finding his missing sister. It makes one think of the roads not taken: would it have been too much effort for Eddie to have had an affair with Marilyn Monroe, or perhaps cradled a dying Martin Luther King Jr. in his arms? Perhaps Aurie could have fallen in love with Spiro Agnew. Someone could have seen Bernard Barker running from the Watergate complex, as they were making love to Eartha Kitt in the Howard Johnson's across the street.

Carter thanks his "marvelous editor, Phyllis Grann," but I want to know what Ms. Grann *did*. If she edited the manuscript down from 1,800 pages to 577, then yes, that is marvelous. But I think it's slightly more likely that most every word that popped into Carter's head made it in, so shame, shame, shame on you, Phyllis Grann.

Tammy says

This is not for the mentally lazy. The reader will work on every page to keep up or be lost forever in the twists and turns of this one. That said, I accepted the challenge and emerged victorious and thoroughly entertained.

Bill says

A Slow Ramble Through The Sixties, (2012)

Carter, Stephen L. (2008). Palace Council. New York: Vintage.

The characters are interesting and well-rounded in this saga of a prominent black community in Harlem, from the mid-1950's to the mid-1970's. Eddie Wesley is a black ("Negro") writer who achieves sudden early

fame and prosperity, which admits him into the upper echelons of rich black society. He loves Aurelia, but she marries someone else for money and status. Her relationship with Eddie nevertheless smolders throughout the novel.

A cryptic prologue establishes that there is a committee of prominent black, and white men, called The Palace Council, and they are secretly plotting something socially dangerous, possibly revolutionary. One of its members is found dead in the park, by Eddie. He investigates, but discovers little. When his sister goes missing, he has reason to believe it is related to the secret society. The rest of the 500 pages are consumed by him trying to find his sister, along the way, discovering new people and places .

The intrigue of the Palace Council starts out more mysterious than it ever gets later. Eddie is hauled in front of J. Edgar Hoover and threatened and cajoled to be a spy in the black community. Hoover hints that if he ever hopes to see his sister again, he will cooperate. Meanwhile, Aurelia's rich husband is apparently involved in the Palace Council. She is so well-connected, Richard Nixon takes her calls, as she tries to help Eddie find his sister. Eddie, however, is a speechwriter for JFK. Hoover's men try to get Eddie to spy on JFK. Frightened, Eddie quits the White House instead, and seeks advice from his Harlem neighbor, Langston Hughes.

And that's the kind of book it is, an exploration of wealthy African-American life in "the sixties," with lots of ambiance, with prominent political and social figures, and scenery ranging from New York and Washington to Saigon and Hong Kong. The mystery of the Palace Council, which you thought the book would be about, diffuses into the background and becomes almost irrelevant. The author tries to keep the mystery alive with Da Vinci Code-like, cryptic, pseudo-religious clues, but since there is nothing at stake, there is no dramatic tension, and that story becomes an unnecessary sub-theme.

It's fun to see the changes in America over two decades, although that is usually accomplished with name-dropping and newspaper headlines, not sociological exploration. Also, since the main characters are all extremely wealthy, well-educated and socially and politically connected, it's hard to remember they are black, and because of their demographics, that isn't very important to the story anyway. So I wouldn't say the story is "about" black experience. These are just ordinary Americans of no particular ethnicity, rambling through a period of history. The characters are mildly interesting, but their stories have virtually no point. The writing is above average, scenes are well-drawn, dialog rings emotionally true. If you enjoy good writing, you will probably keep turning the pages.

April says

Once again, the brilliant Stephen Carter writes a hard, but rewarding novel in which you learn about upper class African American life as much as you are entertained by the thriller. The plot is so complicated that I won't attempt to explain it, except to say that terrorism, journalism, writing, solidarity, and paranoia play large parts, as does love of one's family, romantic love, and love of/obsession with one's muse. It's an exciting book, with lots going on, and thus not an easy read, but I found it well worth the time.

Zach says

If you cannot get into the characters within the first few pages, you may not enjoy this as the plot is not as

engaging as it may seem, and the focus of the book is to see how the characters interact/develop.

Other reviews here at the site are quite accurate.

Stephen L. Carter is an excellent author his characters are well drawn, real and easy to become interested in. Also, the subject matter of the small, but often influential African American upper class of the 50s'-60's is interesting and clearly well researched.

The plot quickly raises the reader's curiosity--but WARNING--as others have noted there is not really an "Aha!" moment--questions that were raised with such fanfare earlier on are disposed of in an offhanded way, and are not really explained--as if they no longer really matter. This often leaves the reader feeling disappointed.

Again Carter is clearly a gifted author. Though this is the first book of his I have read, I look forward to reading more.

Lindsay says

Before I rip on this book, I want to state clearly that I liked it pretty well and I like Stephen Carter's voice.

This book could use a very efficient editor. The plot wanders, and there are too many twists. It makes me think of being a kid sitting in church during the sermon, and the preacher would use his "wrapping it up" cadence, and then plunge right back in and keep going. *Palace Council* had too many non-climaxes. Also, too many characters. Ultimately, it was confusing, which can easily slip into boring.

I adore Carter's subjects. This book is set in the black political class in Harlem and Washington during the Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon administrations. A fascinating society in a fascinating time.

Navidad Thélamour says

Whew, this book was a lot! It was a murder mystery and whodunit, an exploration of 20 of the most tumultuous years in American 20th century history and a political thriller, not to mention a foray into Harlem's Golden Age of influential African Americans with the money and connections most never knew existed for them in those days. There was a lot crammed within these 500+ pages, sometimes for the better and sometimes not.

Stephen L. Carter is my favorite author for his ability to weave historical truth with fiction and for his portrayal of the African American community--both modern-day and historically--so accurate in its incisiveness and so taunt in his analysis of it. I've never encountered an author before or since who had such an accurate, compelling and thought-provoking voice about the upper echelons of black culture--the very embodiment of W.E.B. Dubois' *Talented Tenth*--the subculture within a culture that so few even know exists with its own rich history, mores and societal rules. Carter displayed all of this and more within the pages of *Palace Council*, and that I lapped up with the enthusiasm you'd expect from one who'd gone too long without such substance.

I've seen Carter's work described as being Dan Brown-like, and it's true--they do share the element of

mysteries solved through obscure literary references and the thrill of running from killers hellbent on snatching the clues the protagonist has found for themselves. But may I step in here and say that Stephen L. Carter is more wily than Dan Brown, his plots more complex in so many ways? Carter's novels center around both the present and past of affluent African American culture, which allows his reader a basis on which to start from in every read and the thrill of seeing unexpected recurrences of previous characters in diverse stages of their lives. For example, *The Emperor of Ocean Park* revolves around the Garland family who also play a prominent part in *Palace Council*, set 50 years before the events in *Emperor* even happened. Readers who love to follow characters over the spans of their lives--who don't just want to see them one and done in one novel--will love this as I do. This is Carter's angle (pun intended for those who've read this book), rather than the Bond-like supporting female characters of Brown's novels.

Stephen L. Carter's novels are always decadent in setting, but *Palace Council* took the cake. Sweeping from Harlem to Washington D.C. to Saigon and back again, it's the details here that filled so many pages of this novel. There are so many minute and intricate details here that make their world more solid and complete--from street names in Hong Kong to delicious elements of historic events of the 50s, 60s and 70s--that this one novel could **easily** be made into a multi-season TV series--and should! Yet, in the setting of one book, it was a lot to take in at once.

If it's possible for one to drown in literary details, I must say I certainly struggled to stay afloat at times, keeping characters and their bloodlines straight amidst the historical events surrounding them--from Kent State, to the Tet Offensive, to JFK's assassination and beyond. At times the narrative moved at too slow a pace, filled with historical filler and unnecessary scenes, both, which slowed the plot (in true literary form) rather than urging it forward. While these historical landmarks (the dates sometimes toyed with for the benefit of the characters at Carter's admission) helped to center the players within these pages and paint a complete picture of the age they lived in, there were also so many times where historic events seemed just **dumped** in there. (I hesitate to say haphazardly because I doubt Carter does anything "haphazard" ever.) And, I'll admit, the plot was sometimes muddled and muddied by Carter's abundance of clever asides and descriptive tags galore. But Carter's novels reside in the company between Dan Brown's thrillers steeped in literary puzzles and Salman Rushdie's erudition. And for that, he warrants all the praise he has garnered, and remains my favorite author to date. *Palace Council* earned a solid 4 stars sullied only by the editor's inability to rein this one in a little more. (Honestly, a good 75 pages at least could have been ~~chopped~~.) ****

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Beth says

This is a very good book, in many ways a great one.

For me, it was almost too intricate, too finely plotted, for this feeble brain to keep up with! I've spent much of the last week finishing *Palace Council* as I nurse a bad back, and perhaps my brain is wilted a bit as well.

Palace Council is a long book (over 500 pages). The author's note at the end is also worth reading, because Carter explains little changes he made to history, in order to fit in with Eddie Wesley's journey.

The real heroes of this novel are the African-American women, who not only possess the brains, but the

sheer guts to survive and thrive in a culture that seeks to ignore, sometimes destroy, their reputations, their families, their lives.

This is a novel about power, and greed, and evil.

It's also a story about family, about love, and most of all, survival.
