

Going after something else: Sapphire on the evolution from push to precious and the kid.

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 **“Going After Something Else”**: Sapphire on the Evolution from *PUSH* to *Precious* and *The Kid*

Elizabeth A. McNeil, Neal A. Lester, DoVeanna S. Fulton, Lynette D. Myles
Callaloo

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

“Going After Something Else”
Sapphire on the Evolution from *PUSH* to *Precious* and *The Kid*

Elizabeth A. McNeil (*bio*), Neal A. Lester (*bio*), DoVeanna S. Fulton (*bio*),
and Lynette D. Myles (*bio*)

To shed light on the adaptation of *PUSH* to the screen as *Precious* (2010), we spoke with Sapphire in spring 2011 about the process, her involvement, and her assessment of the completed project.

McNeil, Lester, Fulton, and Myles:

Although it is known that the film adaptation of *PUSH* was titled *Precious* to differentiate it from another recent film titled *Push*, are there other important reasons why the title of the film adaptation of *PUSH* is *Precious: Based on the Novel Push by Sapphire*? Does this title signify distinctions between your novel and the film?

Sapphire:

The original title of the film was *Push*. To the best of my knowledge it was not so much to “differentiate” from the other film that the title of the film was changed; the title of the film was changed to avoid a lawsuit.

Unlike in the literary world where an idea or title cannot be copyrighted, that is not the case in the film industry. (For example, Norman Mailer published a book entitled *American Dreams* when I published my first book with the same title. There was not even the thought of a conflict.) When the film came out in the beginning using the title *Push*, the Dakota Fanning camp had already filed the necessary legal documents that gave them the sole right to use the title *Push*. They pushed back hard when we tried to use the title. They said unequivocally you may NOT use the title.

The initial response to their action was to change the title of the film to *Push: Based on the Novel by Sapphire*. This would have been a way to differentiate the two films, which are so hugely distinct in every way. They again responded with the edict “You can NOT use the word ‘push’ in your title.” At that point the decision was made to call the film *Precious: Based on the Novel Push by Sapphire*. *Precious* is an abbreviation of that title.

McNeil, et al.:

Arguably, writing a novel or a poem does not inherently engage the same kind of collaborative creative process that making a film does. What, if anything, did this filmmaking collaboration reveal to you as a writer and artist around such details as screenplay writing, casting, staging, set construction, lighting, music, narrative interpretation, etc.?

Sapphire:

I was given the screenplay by Lee Daniels. I went over it page by page, making suggestions for changes, offering praise where I felt the text worked well. The major changes **[End Page 352]** I suggested, and that's what they were, suggestions, because I had no contractual rights as far as vetting or altering the screenplay, Lee went along with. One of the changes involved totally removing Steven Spielberg/*Color Purple*-type-father-redemption-reconciliation scenes. The screenwriter was so upset at what he felt would be a blanket condemnation of black men, he asked to have his name removed from the film. We went to Sundance without him. That was part of the reason I was initially so publically involved as a writer because Geoffrey was not on board. There were other areas I impacted the actual text, the screenplay, but none as "dramatic" as that one.

During the filming of the movie, Lee constantly called me wanting to discuss actual passages in the book. He wanted further and deeper interpretation of the actual text. I was surprised and honored. I had thought, after I signed the contract, that would be the last I would be hearing from him. Quite the opposite happened. But the things you mention in your question—music, staging, set design—I had no part in. I had never even been on a movie set before. As an artist observing Lee Daniels work, I was profoundly affected by Lee's powers of interpretation and originality. It was shamanistic the way he moved his actors from one world to the other. For me, what he was doing was magic. As a writer, I had turned images/feelings/sensations into...

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*by Elizabeth A. McNeil, Neal A. Lester,
DoVeanna S. Fulton, and Lynette D. Myles*

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