

Precious: Based on the Novel Push by Sapphire

Precious movie review.

December 11, 2009

[Click image to enlarge](#)

Precious Movie Poster

The full title of the movie I'm reviewing this week is Precious: Based on the Novel Push by Sapphire. I found this title an ingenious way to generate sales for a book on which a movie is based, an example of in-your-face marketing at its best. Maybe someday we'll see The Revenge of Sam: Inspired by the Children's Novel Green Eggs and Ham by Theodor Geisel, also known as Dr. Seuss.

Reviewing this movie puts me in a bit of a bind, as ReptileChannel is very much a family-oriented website, one which children are encouraged to visit. So far the movies I've discussed have been airy family entertainments such as A Christmas Carol and Fantastic Mr. Fox, or over-the-top action flicks such as 2012. Believe it or not, I do also see more serious dramatic movies, and this is one with a vengeance. Precious is far from airy. It examines a hellish existence that, sadly, may be more commonplace than we want to believe. I'm going to try to review this movie in a way that is in keeping with the family nature of ReptileChannel.

Precious is about an obese, illiterate, African American 16-year-old girl who lives in Harlem with her monster of a mother. Her name is Claireece Precious Jones, and when we first meet her she is barely willing, perhaps even unable, to communicate. When she speaks it is a low mutter, words grudgingly surrendered. Though she is only 16, Precious is also the mother of a toddler with Down's Syndrome who has been sent to live with her grandmother. Another child is on the way. It's clear that Precious is angry and on the brink, yet when we see what her home life at the hands of her mother and her mother's boyfriend is like, we're amazed she can function at all.

Precious is given the opportunity to attend an alternative school where she will receive specialized attention to help her learn to read and write. Her mother Mary, portrayed with horrifying and, in my opinion, Academy Award-worthy intensity by Mo'Nique, does not want Precious to succeed at anything. Not only would this wound Mary's warped and fragile ego, Mary's primary goal is to keep the welfare checks coming. That means any effort at self betterment, including Precious attending a school that could provide the help she needs, must be squashed.

Despite taunting threats and abuse from her mother, both verbal and physical, Precious enrolls in the new school, where she meets a sympathetic teacher and a group of other at-risk young women. As Precious is encouraged to realize her own self worth, a gradual transformation to an increasingly confident young mother begins to take place. Though this movie features powerful scenes of brutality that linger in the memory long after you leave the theater, you do leave with a feeling of hope for this girl. She's not particularly likable at the outset, but by the end you're rooting for her, and it is this level of investment in a character that makes for powerful movies.

Gabourey "Gabby" Sidibe makes her acting debut as Precious. Herself a resident of Harlem, it is hard to imagine a more perfect casting choice. Precious does not talk much, but Sidibe shouts volumes by sheer presence alone. The torments Precious have been forced to endure are crushingly evident in every gesture, from a shifting of the eyes to the way she slumps in a chair. I would not be surprised if both she and Mo'Nique end up with Oscar nominations. Two familiar names appear in the credits but you may not recognize them in the actual movie. Mariah Carey is mostly unrecognizable as a social worker and Lenny Kravitz plays a sympathetic nurse Precious meets while in a hospital to give birth to her second child.

Final verdict: Precious: Based on the Novel by Sapphire packs an emotional punch. It provides a harrowing look at inner-city life and a strong appreciation for literacy programs (Sapphire, the author of the novel, was a literacy teacher in Harlem). It also shines a light upon, and brings us to sympathize with, a deserving person who was invisible. For this, Precious is highly recommended.

[Back to Blogs>>](#)