

Push: A Novel
Sapphire
Knopf Publishing Group

Reviews

- [Publishers Weekly](#) (June 10, 1996): “With this much anticipated first novel, told from the point of view of an illiterate, brutalized Harlem teenager, Sapphire (*American Dreams*), a writer affiliated with the Nuyorican poets, charts the psychic damage of the most ghettoized of inner-city inhabitants. [...] Sapphire has created a remarkable heroine in Precious, whose first-person street talk is by turns blisteringly savvy, rawly lyrical, hilariously pig-headed and wrenchingly vulnerable.”
- [The New York Times](#) (June 14, 1996): “...a much-talked-about first novel by a poet named Sapphire, a novel that manages to be disturbing, affecting and manipulative all at the same time. [...] What prevents all this from sounding as cloying as the characters’ names is Precious’s street-smart, angry voice, a voice that may shock readers with its liberal use of four-letter words and graphic descriptions of sex, but a voice that also conjures up Precious’s gritty, unforgiving world. Sapphire somehow finds lyricism in Precious’s life, and in endowing Precious with her own generous gifts for language, she allows us entree into her heroine’s state of mind.”

Awards

- ALA Black Caucus First Novelist Award (Not archived, retrieved from [Penguin Random House](#))
- Mind Book of the Year Award (Not archived, retrieved from [Penguin Random House](#))

Lists

- *Village Voice* Top Ten Books, 1996 (Not archived, retrieved from [Penguin Random House](#))
- *Time Out New York* Top Ten Books, 1996 (Not archived, retrieved from [Penguin Random House](#))

Response to Challenges

- Author Sapphire, in response to the Davison Community Schools (Michigan) decision to remove *Push* from school libraries: “I do not think teenagers should be shielded from these very cruel facts of life. And the book reflects... the language that they use. [...] The things in my book, the journey that the character takes- the language that is used ends up liberating her and allowing her to access the whole world of language. It does not diminish the character and it does not diminish the reader.” ([ABC 12 News](#))

- Author Sapphire, on reader responses to *Push*: “In Michigan one woman held up the book, trembling, saying: ‘I’ve never heard of anything like this in my life.’ On the other side of the room there was a psychiatrist who said: ‘I hear it every day.’” ([The Guardian](#))
- Author Michael Silverblatt, in conversation with Sapphire: “I think both of these books [*Push* and sequel *The Kid*] will be part of the American legacy. The history of American literature is a history of our people telling their own story. It doesn’t matter whether it’s Saul Bellow or Amy Tan. Literature is always one generation after another of people who get to step up and tell the story honestly, and with the respect for what literature is. And that is what I think Sapphire has done.” ([LAist](#))
- Teacher Mary Baron: “*PUSH* is obscene and violent. It is true and admirable. [...] I am going to teach *PUSH* because I know students like Precious.” Speaking of her students who plan to become teachers themselves, she said, “They need to read *PUSH* before they look out over a class, which includes children like Precious: children beaten, abused, neglected, hungry, or homeless. They should know the difference between surliness and despair before they misread one for the other. They will have to learn the terrible truths of their students’ lives.” ([ALAN](#))
- PEN America Utah Chapter Leader Paisley Rekdal, in response to the Alpine School District (Utah) decision to remove 52 books from school libraries, including *Push*: “Alpine School District’s ban on these books—some of which are beloved texts from my own childhood—is a grave and disappointing mistake. Banning books that tackle the complexity of sexuality, gender, identity, and young adulthood out of the misguided fear that younger readers can’t distinguish between fact and fiction, and won’t be able to comprehend and even critique for themselves any idea that challenges them is both patronizing and naïve. People long for more, not less complexity, and young readers should be given the texts—and tools—that allow them to navigate the world they actually live in.” ([PEN America](#))
- PEN America’s Jonathan Friedman, in response to the same incident: “Students have a right to learn about the variety of human experiences and perspectives that these books provide.” ([PEN America](#))
- Teacher Mary Kubicek, in response to the Dearborn Public Schools (Michigan) decision to remove 7 books from school libraries, including *Push*: “This is an attack on our public schools and our public libraries, and this is an attempt to take away people’s rights to read and people’s right to hear the stories of other people.” ([The Detroit News](#))
- Dearborn Mayor Abdullah Hammoud, in response to the rhetoric behind the same bans: “The same dangerous ideology that once considered people like me ‘a problem’ in Dearborn is now being revived under the guise of preserving ‘liberty’.” ([Latin Times](#))

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