

Reardon, Tiffani

Dr. Powell

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Precious Jones's Changing Individualism and Its Effects On her Attitude Toward Louis
Farrakhan

Precious Jones, in Sapphire's *PUSH*, is strongly influenced by Louis Farrakhan and his movement in the beginning of the story. However, it is evident through both the changes in how often she talks about him and the context of which she talks about him each time, that as she progresses through her education she becomes more of an individual, relying less and less on his views. In the beginning of the story, she says things that clearly come from her admiration of Farrakhan. "Crackers is the cause of everything bad. It why my father ack like he do. He has forgot he is the Original Man!" (Sapphire 34). She gets this from Farrakhan's Nation of Islam views of white people.

Louis Farrakhan is a symbol of manhood and unity to many African Americans. When he delivered a two and a half hour speech at the Million Man March, he showed African Americans what they could do with the proper determination.

One unanticipated realization (to my mind, at least) is that the march demonstrated to an entire generation of young black people that a million black men could gather together in one location with mutual respect and without incident. This is not an insignificant experience for an age group which has witnessed almost two decades of uninterrupted urban violence. (Allen 27)

Precious sees this and idolizes him as the “real man” because she herself has lived a life full of abuse and violence. Though hers does not come directly from white people, she blames it on them rather than her father because Farrakhan blames white people for the hardships blacks have faced.

Precious’s adoration for Farrakhan expresses her ignorance of him and the world around her. Farrakhan has extreme views about certain people, and Precious follows them blindly. She does not understand his reasoning behind hating white people or homosexuals, but she follows him because she likes what he stands for. When she finds out that Ms. Rain is homosexual, she is shocked because she has lived her life on the basis that Farrakhan’s ideals are right, and yet here is a wonderful woman who has helped her through so much and taught her to read and write, who is a homosexual. She does not quite understand it. “But just when I go to break on that shit, go to tell class what Five Percenters ‘n Farrakhan got to say about butches, Ms. Rain tell me I don’t like homosexuals she guess I don’t like her ‘cause she one. I was shocked as shit” (Sapphire 81). She also contradicts herself because she does not understand and know everything Farrakhan was about. Farrakhan believed that women were subservient to men, which is exactly what her father did to her, something she hated about herself more than anything.

This is where she begins her turning point. She realizes that Ms. Rain has been such a great impact on her life, and she does not care that she is homosexual. “Too bad about Farrakhan. I still believe allah and stuff. I guess I still believe everything. Ms. Rain say homos not who rape me, not homos who let me sit up not learn for sixteen years, not homos who sell crack fuck Harlem. It’s true. Ms Rain the one who put the chalk in my hand, make me queen of the ABCs” (Sapphire 81). She begins to show more independence, ability to think for herself. In the beginning of the story, we see that she has the desire to be an individual, to stand up for herself,

but she just does not have the drive to go all the way. In regards to the conversation between Mr. Wicher and Precious on pages 4 and 5, Stapleton quotes Paulo Freire in the observation, “Indeed, her rebellious outburst in class reflects a voice that is for now inarticulate but that seeks freedom and implies that ‘sooner or later being less human leads the oppressed to struggle against those who made them so’” (Stapleton 214-215).

As Precious becomes more educated, she also becomes more of an individual and gains a better self-perception of herself. “Precious Jones begins with an outpouring of assertion and continues to speak out; she shares her journal entries with her teacher, relates her other experiences to her classmates and support group members, and moves toward a goal or public expression in a class-wide journal” (Reid 318). She becomes more confident that she can enjoy the better life that she is building for herself and that she has friends who are there to support her.

Sapphire explains in an interview that:

There are several points in the novel where Precious could have said ‘No.’ She could have said ‘No’ to the man when he first came to help her. She could have said ‘No’ when she found out Miss Blue Rain was gay. But she keeps saying ‘Yes.’ She keeps entertaining what I think is a very African mentality: she is able to embrace dual paradigms. Precious says, ‘I believe in Farrakhan, but I also believe in Alice Walker and Miss Rain.’ We see a multiple consciousness which is very different from a Western reality (James 43).

Her newfound independence prompts her to look to the women who have made real impacts on her life. It makes her look to Alice Walker, author of *The Color Purple* because she feels she can relate to her story. She feels she can learn from her. She looks to Ms. Rain because she has taught her so much and has made such an impact on her life already. She looks to the “mother”

of her halfway house because she treats her as if she were her real mother, something she missed out on in her childhood. She looks to her friends from class because they each have been through their own hardships and can relate to her.

PUSH begins with a sixteen-year-old, illiterate, ignorant girl who has had two children of her father. Farrakhan is her only male role model because she is the only man she has ever seen as good. That said, she also does not understand all of his ideals. All she really knows is that he stands for something better than what she has to live through every day. When she meets Ms. Rain, her whole life is turned around for the better. "Precious learns not only how to read and write about her life, but how to make it her own for the first time" (Sapphire, abstract). As she grows in her academics, she also grows as an individual. Through her individualism, she learns that not everything is black and white, there is a middle ground. She sees that Farrakhan has ideals that she doesn't necessarily agree with and she is okay with that. In the end, she still has much adoration for him, but with a new understanding of what it means to idolize him. She now knows that she does not need a male role model to do better for herself, she needs self-confidence. Precious's overall attitude toward Farrakhan is one of respect. She comes to truly understand him, and in the process also understands herself. Though she does not agree with everything he believes in, she respects his beliefs and continues to look up to him regardless. This is a huge sign of her growing independence. Many people never truly understand themselves, let alone another person. She finds herself through her education because it is something she has always wanted and needed. She learns about the things Farrakhan does and believes, and she accepts their differences. The acceptance is the key. Acceptance is something people very rarely do anymore, even when they do have the capacity to do so. Precious Jones, an abused, invisible child, has accepted herself, Farrakhan, and the people around her. She accepts

that her wonderful teacher is a homosexual. She accepts that her friend was once a crack addict. Moreover, she accepts that she, herself, deserves a good, happy life and that she can make it happen. Her straying from, and acceptance of Farrakhan and his ideals is what makes Precious an individual.

Works Cited

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