Book Summary, Author Biography & Book Reviews

The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates (Wes Moore)
New York, Spiegel & Grau (2010)

Book Summary
Two kids with the same name were born blocks apart in the same decaying city within a year of each other. One grew up to be a Rhodes Scholar, army officer, White House Fellow, and business leader. The other is serving a life sentence in prison. Here is the story of two boys and the journey of a generation.

In December of 2000, the Baltimore Sun ran a small piece about Wes Moore, a local student who had just received a Rhodes Scholarship. The same paper ran a huge story about four young men who had killed a police officer in a spectacularly botched armed robbery. The police were still hunting for two of the suspects who had gone on the lam, a pair of brothers. One of their names was Wes Moore.

Wes Moore, the Rhodes Scholar, became obsessed with the story of this man he’d never met but who shared much more than space in the same newspaper. Both had grown up in similar neighborhoods and had had difficult childhoods. After following the story of the robbery, the manhunt, and the trial to its conclusion, he finally he wrote a letter to the other Wes, now a convicted murderer serving a life sentence without possibility of parole. His letter tentatively asked the questions that had been haunting Wes: Who are you? Where did it go wrong for you? How did this happen?

Moore’s letter led to a correspondence and deepening relationship that has lasted for several years. Over dozens of letters and prison visits, Wes discovered that the other Wes had had a life similar to his: they were both fatherless, were both in and out of school; they’d hung out on similar corners with similar crews, and had run into trouble with the police. And they had both felt a desire for something better for themselves and their families—and the sense that something better was always just out of reach.

At each stage of their young lives, they came across similar moments of decision that would alter their fates.

Told in alternating dramatic narratives that take readers from heart-wrenching losses to moments of surprising redemption, The Other Wes Moore tells the story of a generation of boys trying to find their way in a hostile world.

(Source: Publisher)

Wes Moore was born in 1978 and was three years old when his father, a respected radio and television host, died in front of him. His mother, hoping for a better future for her family, made great sacrifices to send Wes and his sisters to private school. Caught between two worlds — the affluence of his classmates and the struggles of his neighbors — Wes began to act out, succumbing to bad grades, suspensions, and delinquencies.

Desperate to reverse his behavior, his mother sent him to military school in Pennsylvania. After trying to escape five times, Wes finally decided to stop railing against the system and become accountable for his actions. By graduation six years later, Moore was company commander overseeing 125 cadets.

Wes graduated Phi Theta Kappa as a commissioned officer from Valley Forge Military College in 1998 and Phi Beta Kappa from Johns Hopkins University in 2001 with a bachelor’s degree in International Relations. At Johns Hopkins he was honored by the Maryland College Football Hall of Fame.

He completed an M. Litt in International Relations from Oxford University as a Rhodes Scholar in 2004. Wes was a paratrooper and Captain in the United States Army, serving a combat tour of duty in Afghanistan with the elite 1st Brigade of the 82nd Airborne Division in 2005–2006.

Wes spearheaded the American strategic support plan for the Afghan Reconciliation Program that unites former insurgents with the new Afghan Government. He is recognized as an authority on the rise and ramifications of radical Islamism in the Western Hemisphere.
A White House Fellow from 2006–2007, Wes served as a Special Assistant to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. Following his time at the White House, Wes became an investment professional in New York at Citigroup, focusing on global technology and alternative investments.

In 2009 he was selected as an Asia Society Fellow. Moore was named one of Ebony magazine’s “Top 30 Leaders Under 30” for 2007 and Crain’s New York Business “40 Under 40 Rising Stars” in 2009.

Wes is passionate about supporting U.S. veterans and examining the roles education, mentoring and public service play in the lives of American youth. He serves on the board of the Iraq Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) and founded an organization called STAND! through Johns Hopkins that works with Baltimore youth involved in the criminal justice system.

Wes was also a featured speaker at the 2008 Democratic National Convention in Denver and addressed the crowd from Invesco Field. Seeking to help other young people redirect their lives, Wes is committed to being a positive influence and helping youth find the support they need to enact change. Pointing out that a high school student drops out every nine seconds, Wes says that public servants — the teachers, mentors and volunteers who work with our youth — are as imperative to our national standing and survival as are our armed forces. “Public service does not have to be an occupation,” Moore says, “but it must be a way of life.”

He has been featured by such media outlets as People magazine, the New York Times, Washington Post, CSPAN, and MSNBC, amongst others.

Movie rights to The Other Wes Moore have been optioned by Oprah Winfrey and HBO Films. A young adult version of the book, titled Discovering Wes Moore, was published in 2012.

(Source: Publisher and American Program Bureau, Inc.)
Book Reviews
The author emphasizes that the point of his book is not to depict a "good" Wes Moore and a "bad" Wes Moore. He says he wanted to illustrate not the differences between their lives but the similarities, particularly what it's like to grow up without a father in the house — an experience he shares with an estimated one out of three children, according to 2009 U.S. Census Bureau data. Moore's hope is that his story will encourage Americans to step in at crucial moments to help other troubled 12-year-olds. "It's not a race issue," he says. "It's a national issue which threatens the future of the United States. We're spending billions on prisons. Mathematically, it's unsustainable."
—Deirdre Donahue, USA Today

Two hauntingly similar boys take starkly different paths in this searing tale of the ghetto. Moore, an investment banker, Rhodes scholar, and former aide to Condoleezza Rice, was intrigued when he learned that another Wes Moore, his age and from the same area of Greater Baltimore, was wanted for killing a cop. Meeting his double and delving into his life reveals deeper likenesses: raised in fatherless families and poor black neighborhoods, both felt the lure of the money and status to be gained from dealing drugs. That the author resisted the criminal underworld while the other Wes drifted into it is chalked up less to character than to the influence of relatives, mentors, and expectations that pushed against his own delinquent impulses, to the point of exiling him to military school. Moore writes with subtlety and insight about the plight of ghetto youth, viewing it from inside and out; he probes beneath the pathologies to reveal the pressures—poverty, a lack of prospects, the need to respond to violence with greater violence—that propelled the other Wes to his doom. The result is a moving exploration of roads not taken.
—Publishers Weekly

The author examines eight years in the lives of both Wes Moores to explore the factors and choices that led one to a Rhodes scholarship, military service, and a White House fellowship, and the other to drug dealing [and] prison.... Moore ends this haunting look at two lives with a call to action and a detailed resource guide.
—Vanessa Bush, Booklist

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