Chancellor’s Reading Club Selection for 2014

The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates; A Story of Tragedy and Hope by Wes Moore
Fayetteville State University
Charles W. Chesnutt Library

Wes Moore

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The following guide contains a compilation of information about the book, The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates; A Story of Tragedy and Hope by Wes Moore. Links and full-text are provided to reviews, a brief biography and a radio interview. This material is copyrighted and compiled for educational use. Credit should be given if the material is utilized. If you have any questions about this guide, please contact Jan Whitfield by email at jwhitfield@uncfsu.edu or by phone at 910-672-1750.

Introduction

This is the story of two boys living in Baltimore with similar histories and an identical name: Wes Moore. One of us is free and has experienced things that he never even knew to dream about as a kid. The other will spend every day until his death behind bars for an armed robbery that left a police officer and father of five dead. The chilling truth is that his story could have been mine. The tragedy is that my story could have been his. Our stories are obviously specific to our two lives, but I hope they will illuminate the crucial inflection points in every life, the sudden moments of decision where our paths diverge and our fates are sealed. It’s unsettling to know how little separates each of us from another life altogether.

In late 2000, the Baltimore Sun published a short article with the headline “Local Graduate Named Rhodes Scholar.” It was about me. As a senior at Johns Hopkins University, I received one of the most prestigious academic awards for students in the world. That fall I was moving to England to attend Oxford University on a full scholarship.

But that story had less of an impact on me than another series of articles in the Sun, about an incident that happened just months before, a precisely planned jewelry store robbery gone terribly wrong. The store’s security guard—an off-duty police officer named Bruce Prothero—was shot and killed after he pursued the armed men into
**The other Wes Moore : one name, two fates**

**Author:** Wes Moore  
**Publisher:** New York : Spiegel & Grau, 2010.  
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Biography  
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**All Authors / Contributors:** Wes Moore  

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**OCLC Number:** 430839083  
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Fathers and Angels. Is daddy coming with us? ; In search of home ; Foreign ground. --  
Choices and Second Chances. Marking territory ; Lost ; Hunted. --  
Paths Taken and Expectations Fulfilled. The land that God forgot ; Surrounded - - A call to action / Tavis Smiley.  

**Summary:** Two kids with the same name were born blocks apart in the same decaying city within a few years 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. Told in alternating dramatic narratives that take readers from heart-wrenching losses to moments of surprising redemption, this is the story of two boys and the journey of a generation trying to find their way in a hostile world.  

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**Edition/Format:**  
Book : Biography : English : 1st ed
PERSONAL INFORMATION:


CAREER:

Writer and businessman. White House Fellow, special assistant to Condoleezza Rice, 2006-07; Asia Society Fellow, 2009.

AWARDS:

Rhodes Scholar.

WORKS:

WRITINGS:


Sidelights

Wes Moore is an American author, U.S. Army combat veteran, businessman, and youth advocate. Moore's accomplishments are vast. He graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Johns Hopkins University in 2001 with a bachelor’s degree in International Relations and went on to earn an M.Litt. in international relations from
Oxford University as a Rhodes scholar in 2004. He served a tour of duty in Afghanistan and was a White House fellow from 2006-07, working as a special assistant to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. Moore now works as an investment professional in New York at Citigroup. Moore was named one of Ebony magazine's "Top 30 Leaders under 30" for 2007. He has also been featured in media outlets such as People, New York Times, Washington Post, C-SPAN, and MSNBC. He was a featured speaker at the 2008 Democratic National Convention in Denver, Colorado.

Moore's first book is The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates. Moore got the idea for the book in 2000, when he was preparing to leave for Oxford University. On December 11, 2000, the Baltimore Sun ran an article on Moore that chronicled how he came to be a Rhodes scholar despite his difficult childhood. Simultaneously the Sun ran an article on four African American males convicted of the murder of an off-duty police officer, one of whom was also coincidentally named Wes Moore. Moore was struck by several similarities between himself and the convicted Wes Moore: they were both African American males who grew up in the same area around the same time. Moore wrote a letter to the convicted Moore in prison, and roughly a month later he received a response. Following this initial contact, Moore visited the convicted Moore in prison more than a dozen times. Gradually he began to discover that he and the other Moore had even more in common than he had realized: they both had troubled childhoods and had grown up fatherless. Moore began to wonder how two men with such similar backstories ended up at such staunchly different places in their lives. Moore realized there was a story to be told about choices and the importance of positive influences and support for young people. Both the author and the other Moore had brushes with the law at an early age. The other Moore, whose father had abandoned the family, had a drug-dealer older brother and a mother who could do little to help him stay out of trouble. The author, whose father died when he was three years old, was arrested for graffiti at a young age. However, when he began to get into trouble, his family pulled together enough money to send him to military school. Moore has emphasized in several interviews that it was not his goal to portray a "good" Wes Moore and a "bad" Wes Moore, but rather, to show how similar their lives have been and to demonstrate the power of positive and negative influences on young people.

The Other Wes Moore is the story of both men, told in alternating narratives. In a review of the work on OregonLive.com, contributor John Strawn noted: "Wes Moore, whose determination and ambition shine through the pages of The Other Wes Moore, may succeed in converting the interest generated by this well-promoted book into a genuine debate about opportunity and aspiration, and the enduring cost of racism." Library Journal contributor Julie Biando Edwards described the work as an "engaging and insightful book" and remarked that it prompts readers to "consider the ways in which we as a nation alternately support and fail American children." A Kirkus Reviews contributor characterized the work as "a story about two young African American men who share the same name and grew up on the same inner-city streets, but wound up in vastly different places." Booklist contributor Vanessa Bush noted: "Moore ends this haunting look at two lives with a call to action and a detailed resource guide." Wilson Quarterly contributor Benjamin Rich stated: "Moore interweaves their stories in an elegant narrative, bobbing between living rooms, basketball courts, alleys, lawns, stoops, and, most important, the prison visiting room where he interviews the other Wes Moore, whose existence the author discovered in a newspaper story about the robbery. ... The book's chief triumph is to capture so matter-of-factly the permanent state of mourning experienced by an entire generation of black men who grew up without fathers." Stacie Williams, a contributor to Christian Science Monitor, reported: "The writing style is straightforward and sympathetic though, to his credit, Moore the author makes it clear that he doesn't condone the other Moore's actions or make excuses for the murder of Officer Bruce Prothero. ... Moore asks that readers not underestimate the role of the many variables in the lives of individuals. But he also pleads with them not to discount the power of self-determination."

FURTHER READINGS:

FURTHER READINGS ABOUT THE AUTHOR:
PERIODICALS

- *All Things Considered*, April 28, 2010, "The Destinies of Two Men Who Share One Name."
- *Kirkus Reviews*, March 1, 2010, review of *The Other Wes Moore*.
- *Online NewsHour*, May 12, 2010, "Author Wes Moore's Book Explores His Own Alternate Reality."
- *USA Today*, May 7, 2010, Doug Kapustin, "The Other Wes Moore author knows what might have been."

ONLINE


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From NPR News, this is ALL THINGS CONSIDERED. I'm Melissa Block.

MICHELE NORRIS, host:

And I'm Michele Norris.

And we're going to spend some time considering the notion of fate and the destinies who share one name, Wes Moore. The first Wes Moore escaped a rough- and-tumble childhood to become a model of achievement, decorated combat veteran, White House Fellow, business leader.

Just after that Wes Moore learned he'd won a Rhodes Scholarship in late 2000, he also learned about another Wes Moore, who would soon be sentenced to life in prison for his role in a botched jewelry store robbery that resulted in the death of an off-duty police officer.

The stories of both Wes Moores were chronicled in the Baltimore Sun. Wes Moore the achiever was so rattled by the coincidence he eventually wrote a letter to Wes Moore, the prisoner. The resulting correspondence led to a journey of discovery and friendship and a book published this week. It's called "The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates."

Wes Moore the achiever and now author took us back to the moment he first learned of his counterpart.

Mr. WES MOORE (Author, "The Other Wes Moore"): I was in South Africa, living in one of the townships of South Africa doing research, and I got a call from my mother, and we were talking for a little bit, and she said, I have something crazy to tell you. She said, you know, the cops are looking for a man with your name in your neighborhood for killing a cop. And it hit me. I was like, what? And she said, there are wanted signs all over your neighborhood for Wes Moore, and if you happen to see Wes Moore, do not approach because he's assumed to be armed and very dangerous.

That was the first time I really even learned about him, but then as I started reading these articles and learning about this other Wes Moore, I realized that we had so much more in common that just our name. The fact that we both came up in single-parent households, the fact that we both had trouble with school and the fact that we both had, you know, these interactions with the criminal justice system.

That always haunted me, and it just sat with me for years until I eventually decided to write him that letter.

NORRIS: What did you expect to hear back, and what kind of response did you actually get?

Mr. MOORE: Well, you know, initially, I wasn't even expecting to hear back. The day after I mailed that letter, I thought to myself, man, that was a mistake. I was asking what, in retrospect, were relatively naive questions, like, you know, who are you? And I was asking questions about his kids and about his older brother, who I knew was also in prison.

I was actually a bit surprised when a month later, I get a note from Jessup Correctional Institution from Wes Moore. And it was just a remarkable letter where he just literally went point by point answering the questions. And he was explaining to me how much it meant to him that I wrote him in the first place because he said when you're behind bars, you believe that no one even knows that you exist anymore.
NORRIS: Now, we ticked through some of your achievements. You have a sterling resume. Perhaps you could for us tick through a few of the important milestones in the other Wes Moore's life.

Mr. MOORE: I think there were a few really important milestones. I think, you know, a couple crucial moments have to come down to the first time that he started experimenting and getting involved in the drug life in Baltimore. As he first started, you know, getting involved with the, in many ways, the revolving door of the juvenile and eventually adult criminal justice system. The time that he first had his first children when he was 16 and 17, and then two more children at 19 and 20 years old and the way that shapes your future and affects the way you think about your future and the future of your family as a whole.

And after, you know, being involved in drugs and having a chance now to rebuild his life, going to Job Corps, getting his GED, when he came out of that GED program, he was very fired up and excited about life and excited to do things differently and realized just how strong that calling and how strong that pullback into the streets was, to the point that it eventually broke him.

NORRIS: When you talk about the grip of the street, you often think of this sort of voracious force that grabs young men and women, but in his case, it was almost like he drifted into drugs, both using drugs and selling them. He saw a kid with a cool headset that looked like something out of a Janet Jackson video and said, ooh, I want one of those.

Mr. MOORE: That's right.

NORRIS: And before long, he was a lookout.

Mr. MOORE: That's exactly right. My mother always says, she says, you know, kids need to think that you care before they care what you think. What Wes saw from the streets and from, you know, the kids on the corner and the kids who were dealing was he saw kids who he felt at that time genuinely cared about him and genuinely cared about his future. And he saw what they had and the material items that they had and how cool they looked, and then you see these kids who are willing to take you in and embrace you as family.

What they say starts meaning a whole lot more than what the teachers are saying or what the community leaders are saying. And that's that pull, that's that draw that really dragged Wes in.

NORRIS: Now, we should say that you also had run-ins with the law yourself, and you flirted with the idea of walking across that line and leading a life that could ultimately have led to prison. But when you were arrested for spraying graffiti on a wall, you immediately knew this is not someplace I want to be. And you were with someone who had a very different reaction. He almost dealt with the cops like, come on, bring it on. I'm tougher than you are.

Mr. MOORE: That's exactly right, and you know, I think about it, and it is almost embarrassing now to think about the fact that I was, you know, here I was with, you know, with a tremendous mother and, you know, support from family but just this draw of the streets and this challenge that I was personally having internally about what does it mean to be a man, was really pulling at me. So it manifested itself in things like vandalism and getting into fights.

And it was really at that point that my mother decided, she said, you know, I've got to do something different. You know, I've tried other schools in the Bronx, and this hasn't worked. So I'm just going to try something completely new, and that's when she decided to send me off to military school.

NORRIS: Is it key for boys to have consistent authority figures, also guides in their life? I guess that's what I was thinking about because your father died when you were very young, but he was there in the very early years, not so for Wes, the other Wes.
Mr. MOORE: Absolutely, yeah. And, you know, there's actually a part in the book where Wes and I are talking about our fathers, and he said something that I think is very true when he said, you know, your father isn't here because he couldn't be. My father wasn't there because he chose not to be. And therefore, we're going to mourn their absences differently.

And I think he's absolutely right. I think we do mourn their absence differently. However, that hole that was left in both of us from not having a father there, from not having that presence there throughout to help us to make decisions is, I think, something that both of us spent a lot of our time, particularly our young years, trying to fill.

NORRIS: What does the other Wes Moore want from this book?

Mr. MOORE: You know, what's amazing, Wes has had the chance to read the whole book, and he's had two reactions to it. The first reaction was, he's like, it's amazing that you got all the facts right because, he said, it's obvious you've done a lot of homework and a lot of research and talked to a lot of people.

But he said the other thing that he realized from the book was how little he's done with his life. He said, he said, listen, I've wasted every opportunity I've ever had in life and I'm going to die in here. So if you can do something to help people understand the ramifications of their decisions and do something to help people understand the neighborhoods in which these decisions are being made, then I think you should do it.

And I'm glad I did it because I think I'm a better person because of this process, and I think I rediscovered a part of myself that I never even dreamed and never even imagined was even there.

NORRIS: Do you feel at times that you're afflicted with something akin to survivor's guilt?

Mr. MOORE: It's a great question because I thought about that as I was, you know, writing this book. And, you know, I would wake up at 5:30 in the morning every morning and begin my day, and I'd write for a couple hours before going to work.

And when you start your day reading a letter from someone who is going to spend the rest of their life in prison, when you start your day like that, it really helps you to think about your day. It humbles you. And I do think about the blessings that I had, the family, and I do feel like I'm very lucky, and I'm sincerely thankful for it.

NORRIS: Wes Moore, thank you very much.

Mr. MOORE: Thank you so much.

NORRIS: Wes Moore is the other of "The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates."

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Gale Document Number: GALE|A225038190
The article reviews the books "The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates" and "Discovering Wes Moore" by Wes Moore, and presents a message from Moore regarding services in the U.S. for low-income students. Teacher influence on students, Moore's investigation of a man convicted of murder, and educational reform in the U.S. are also discussed.
In December 2000, The Baltimore Sun ran a short article about Wes Moore, a local student who had just received a Rhodes Scholarship. The same paper also ran a headline-grabbing story about four young men who had allegedly 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 the brothers was also named Wes Moore.

Rhodes scholar and The Other Wes Moore author, Wes just couldn't shake off the unsettling coincidence or his inkling that the two shared much more than space in the same newspaper. After following the story of the robbery, the manhunt, and the trial to its conclusion, he wrote a letter to the other Wes, a convicted murderer serving a life sentence without the possibility of parole. His letter tentatively asked the questions that had been haunting him: Who are you? How did this happen?

That letter led to a correspondence and relationship that lasted for several years. Over dozens of letters and prison visits, author Wes discovered that the other Wes had experienced a life not unlike his own. Both had grown up in similar neighborhoods and had difficult childhoods. Both were fatherless. They'd hung out on similar corners with similar crews, and both had run into trouble with the police. At each stage of their young lives they had faced similar moments of decision, yet their choices would lead them to astonishingly different destinies.

Told in dramatic alternating 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.

Also available in a Young Readers Edition:


ADOPTION NOTES:

Selected for Common Reading at more than 30 colleges including: Florida State University; Gustavus Adolphus College; and University of Akron. To view the complete list, go to tiny.cc/s112nw
A Message from the Author

I am living proof that a support system of family, mentors, and educators is critical for success and, as such, have the most tremendous respect for those of you who give tirelessly of yourselves to improve the future of a child. I would like to humbly thank all of you for being heroes to so many of your students, for inspiring them in ways you probably cannot even fathom yet, and for teaching them character and personal responsibility in addition to academics. It is your example, your belief in them, along with the preparation you give them in the classroom, that will unlock doors of opportunity.

I am a grandchild of a retired schoolteacher who taught in the Bronx public school system for over twenty years, the son-in-law of a New York City public elementary school teacher of over twenty years, and a proud advocate for schools and the kids they serve. I have grown up hearing the stories of redemption and disappointment, of joy and pain, and of the success and failure of so many kids who find themselves in a system that currently works for some, but doesn't for too many others. Like a captain on the front lines in Afghanistan, you are the front-line soldiers in the most important battle our nation faces now: the battle to educate and prepare our next generation of leaders.

Just as we need to mobilize leaders and resources around our battles overseas, the same must be done to help our children navigate their journeys into adulthood.

We are all familiar with the disturbing statistics of low graduation and high dropout rates in our nation's public schools. And with more than 50 percent of marriages failing in today's society, and single-parent households the norm in many inner-city communities, children lack the guidance that the family structure once provided. I am sure we are all alarmed that, in today's world, young men of color are more likely to be in prison than in college. For too many in our nation, particularly those who live in our most precarious areas, a broken school system serves as a precursor to entry into the juvenile justice system. But I believe this is a problem we can--and must--tackle.

Studies show that students from low-income communities can and do achieve at high levels when they are given the resources and attention they deserve. And there are amazing educators and civic leaders who are
already leading the charge with impressive steam. I know the fixes aren't simple, nor are they cheap. But there are a few things to remember: The answer isn't simply spending more money; it is to spend money wisely with a focus on the children we intend to serve. The costs of inaction are unbearably high when you consider that it costs nearly $200,000 to incarcerate someone in New York, while a recent Columbia University study shows that cutting the dropout rate in half would yield $45 billion annually in both new federal tax revenues and cost savings.

Promising reforms that embrace alternative teaching platforms, teacher pay systems based on performance, and the inspired $4.35 billion in "Race to the Top" funds that the Obama administration has allocated are tremendous, but a national embrace of innovation and policy change is imperative.

We will need fortitude and ingenuity as we embark on the education reform battle of our lifetime. The chance to raise expectations, the opportunity for our children to do better than their parents, and the need to translate the experience of young students into the dreams of a nation must now drive us all. Just as it was imperative for my fellow soldiers and I to win our fights, the same can be said for you and the work you are doing. As President Obama recently expressed, "The future belongs to the nation that best educates its citizens." I could not agree more.

**Wes Moore**

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The **Other Wes Moore**: One Name and Two Fates; A Story of Tragedy and Hope.

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**Edwards, Julie Biando**

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Reviews & Products:

**OTHER Wes Moore**: One Name & Two Fates: A Story of Tragedy & Hope, The (Book)
In this memoir, Moore tells the story of his life as a child of Baltimore and the Bronx, an army officer in Afghanistan, a Rhodes Scholar, and a former White House Fellow. In detailing his journey from troubled adolescence to successful business career, he focuses on the intriguing concept of chronicling not only his life but that of another young man with the same name, from the same city, and roughly about the same age—the other Wes Moore. Drugs, violence, and prison marked the life of the other Wes Moore, now serving a life sentence for the murder of a police officer. The author, after meeting the man who shares his name, gives us a book that details the parallel lives of these two boys, coming of age the hard way in the 1980s and 1990s. The author includes a list of over 200 organizations dedicated to helping American youth. VERDICT With its unique spin on the memoir genre, this engaging and insightful book ultimately asks the reader to consider the ways in which we as a nation alternately support and fail American children. The charismatic author and the publisher's nationwide publicity plans should make this a popular book for general readers interested in memoir, African American studies, or social issues. [See Prepub Alert, LJ 1/10.]
THE OTHER WES MOORE: One Name and Two Fates--A Story of Tragedy and Hope.


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Moore, Wes
THE OTHER WES MOORE: One Name and Two Fates--A Story of Tragedy and Hope
Spiegel & Grau (288 pp.)
$25.00
May 4, 2010
ISBN: 978-0-385-52819-1
A story about two young African-American men who share the same name and grew up on the same inner-city streets, but wound up in vastly different places.

Author Wes Moore, a Rhodes Scholar, former Army officer and White House Fellow, works in investment banking. The other Wes Moore, a drug dealer, is imprisoned for life. Both are in their early 30s. Upon reading about the other Wes's 2000 conviction for armed robbery, the author wondered how the lives of two youths growing up in the same time (1990s) and place (Baltimore) could take such divergent paths. Drawing on conversations with the other Wes and interviews, the author creates an absorbing narrative that makes clear the critical roles that choices, family support and luck play in young people's lives. The other Wes never knew his father, had a drug-pusher older brother and began dealing at an early age. His mother's efforts to help were ineffectual. Often arrested--car theft, attempted murder, etc.--the other Wes dropped out of school, fathered four children and tried unsuccessfully to go straight. Then he took part in the store hold-up. The author faced similar challenges, he writes, but had enormous family support and several lucky breaks. He grew up with a devoted mother and two sisters; his father died when the author was very young. In 1984, the family moved to the crack-plagued Bronx to live with his caring grandparents, a minister and a teacher. When the author slipped into the local street life and began receiving poor grades at a private school, his family pooled limited resources and sent him away to a military academy. There he found positive role models, became a cadet commander and star athlete and gained a sense of purpose. Later, with help from several mentors, he earned a bachelor's degree at Johns Hopkins and attended Oxford. "With no intervention--or the wrong intervention--[young boys] can be lost forever," the author warns.

A testament to the importance of youth mentoring; includes an afterword by Tavis Smiley and a guide to more than 200 youth-service groups nationwide. (Author tour to Baltimore, Washington, D.C., Boston, New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco. Agent: David Black/David Black Literary Agency)

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The Other Wes Moore.

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Williams, Stacie

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The Other Wes Moore

There are two men with the same name. One is a Rhodes scholar and Johns Hopkins graduate who was a speaker at the 2008 Democratic Convention. The other is a former drug dealer, convicted of murdering a police officer and serving a life sentence at Jessup Correctional Institution in Maryland.

Both men were profiled in the Baltimore Sun for their deeds, which is where The Other Wes Moore begins. Author Wes Moore happened to hear about an ongoing story in the local paper about an armed robbery that ended in the murder of a police officer – a father of five kids – and was struck by the fact that one of the robbers shared his name. Compelled by the odd coincidence, he eventually sent a letter to the other Wes Moore, who by that time had begun serving his life sentence.

"The Other Wes Moore" is the result of that letter and subsequent correspondence between the two men, each eager to meet his namesake and to try to understand how their lives – similar at many turns – became such polar opposites.

Moore interviewed family members, educators, and friends of both men to enhance his narrative, which is organized as coming-of-age snapshots that offer glimpses into the circumstances of both lives. He is earnest but not naive as he challenges the oft-repeated theories of nature vs. nurture and the perceived advantages or disadvantages of race and class.

The stories of both Moores are set against the backdrops – in Baltimore and in the Bronx – of project low-rises, corner boys, and troubled public education systems. Both endured poverty at various times in their lives, both were fatherless, and both attended schools where teachers felt the tragic impact of the crack cocaine epidemic on the lives of their students. It is simultaneously fascinating and heartbreaking to read how certain incidents played large – and sometimes irreversible – roles in both men's lives. While one Moore, for instance, had an experience with a job training program that helped to restore his self-esteem at a vulnerable time, the other Moore was busy dodging bullets and drug dealers on his way to school – only to get there to rack up suspensions and detentions in an effort to appear "down" on the streets. Both men spent time in the back of a police car, but decisions made for them and by them eventually determined that one would never be free of the handcuffs.

As riveting as the snapshots are – occasionally reading like a grim variation of a "Choose Your Own Adventure" story – the narrative falls short on other details, including the author's own marriage and the other Moore's family involvement. (He has four children). Moore paints touching portraits of both mothers and the understanding of what they wanted for themselves and their children ratchets up the tension as the narrative moves forward to confirm the tragic fact that those dreams don't necessarily matter in the face of the life of the streets.
The writing style is straightforward and sympathetic though, to his credit, Moore the author makes it clear that he doesn’t condone the other Moore's actions or make excuses for the murder of Officer Bruce Prothero. The imprisoned Moore continues to deny his involvement, despite substantial evidence to the contrary. Both men lament the impact that fatherlessness had on their lives: One watched his father die and the other's father was an alcoholic who barely recognized his son on the few occasions that he saw him. The author says that he "searched for ways to fill that hole, sometimes in places I shouldn't have looked. I made some tremendous mistakes along the way." However, as readers we are not told what those mistakes were, whereas substantially more of the other Moore's mistakes are laid bare.

The final chapter of the book is a directory of organizations that assist at-risk youth. Moore doesn't strip away the humanity of those who've made mistakes, stressing that people are so different that, "it's hard to know when genetics or environment or just bad luck is decisive." But he feels strongly that good mentors are crucial to help young people make better life decisions.

Everyone makes choices; that's the only concrete conclusion Moore is able to draw. And even though his namesake is in prison, Moore writes with hope about his situation: He has converted to Islam and is trying to build a relationship with his children, albeit behind bars.

Perhaps the most moving passage in "The Other Wes Moore" is also its tag line: "The chilling truth is that Wes's story could have been mine; the tragedy is that my story could have been his." Moore asks that readers not underestimate the role of the many variables in the lives of individuals. But he also pleads with them not to discount the power of self-determination.

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By Stacie Williams

Stacie Williams is a Monitor intern and a candidate for a masters degree in library science at Simmons College.

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Wes Moore: Author or prisoner?

Men who share a name take different paths in life

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JESSUP, Md. -- On a glorious spring afternoon, sunshine glitters off the bales of silver barbed wire at Maryland's vast Jessup Correctional Institution prison complex.

Wes Moore, a buff 31-year-old with male-model looks, sits at a picnic table across the road, watching as armed guards monitor inmates who shuffle on and off prison vans.

"You can't predict where you're going to end up in life," he says quietly. Had just a few things gone differently when he was 12 years old, he might be in prison, along with another guy named Wes Moore. Instead, he's outside the steel bars, talking about his new book.

The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates (Spiegel & Grau, $25) tells the story of two black men with the same name. Both were born in Maryland. Both grew up with single mothers in fatherless homes. By the time they were 11 years old, both had been handcuffed by cops.

One became a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Johns Hopkins, a Rhodes scholar, a White House Fellow under Condoleezza Rice and an Afghanistan combat veteran who spoke at the 2008 Democratic National Convention.

The other Wes Moore, 34, is in the Jessup Correctional Institute's maximum-security unit, where he is serving a life sentence without parole. He was sentenced for his part in a botched robbery in 2000 in which his half-brother, Tony Moore, shot to death an off-duty Baltimore police officer who was the father of five.

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."

A jarring disparity

The origin of The Other Wes Moore goes back to December 2000, when The Baltimore Sun ran an article about Moore being the first African-American Rhodes scholar from Hopkins. His mother, Joy Moore,
mentioned that Wes had the same name as another young Baltimore man who was in the headlines, wanted for murder.

"The disparity was so jarring," says Moore, who kept thinking about the other Wes Moore, whom he did not know. After returning from his Rhodes scholarship in England, he wrote a letter to Jessup and received one in return. Letters turned into visits, and Moore began recording the conversations he had with the convict and his family and friends.

'A hole in their soul'

The story was straight out of HBO's The Wire. At 14, the Baltimore resident was dealing drugs; at 16, he was a father; and before he turned 18, he was charged with the attempted murder of a neighborhood man and was sent to a juvenile detention center.

At one point, he was pulling in $4,000 a day selling crack. His role model: his drug-dealing gangsta big brother, Tony.

As the two Wes Moores talked, the connection between them became clear: the pain of growing up fatherless.

"My mother could teach me to be a good person, but she couldn't teach me to be a good man," says the author, who credits family members and teachers with intervening in his life at pivotal points.

The author was only 3 years old in 1982 when his father, 34, a radio and TV journalist also named Wes Moore, died from a rare but treatable virus.

"So many times, like when I won the Rhodes scholarship, I thought, 'Wouldn't it be great to call up my mom, then say, Pass the phone to Dad,' " he says. "But it was God's decision."

The other Wes Moore experienced something more damaging. He has seen his father, who lived in Baltimore, only three times in his life. The last time he saw his son, Bernard Moore looked up from a drunken stupor and asked, "Who are you?"

Bernard's whereabouts today? Unknown. In the book, the incarcerated Wes Moore tells the author: "Listen, your father wasn't there because he couldn't be. My father wasn't there because he chose not to be."

Roland Warren, president of the non-profit National Fatherhood Initiative, calls absent dads the nation's biggest social crisis.

"Fatherless kids have a hole in their soul in the shape of their father, and it leaves a wound that is not easily healed," he says.

Throughout Moore's book, children are growing up without fathers. The incarcerated Wes Moore has four children with two women. (His mother is raising three of them.) When he was 33, he became a grandfather.

After reading the book, the convicted Wes Moore told the author that "it made him realize how little he's done with his life."

USA TODAY was unable to speak with the imprisoned Wes Moore. Oprah Winfrey featured the book on her show last week; Jessup turned down her interview request because Moore is a convicted murderer and the slain police officer's family objected.
An officer's story

**Wes Moore's** mother, Mary, 55, says she visits her son in prison every week. She was interviewed on Oprah and says "the reaction has been pretty positive. **Other** women could see it and benefit from my story."

She says her son "likes the book, but he was under the impression it was going be a pamphlet handed out by social service agencies, not a book. He has mixed emotions. He didn't think it was going to be for profit."

(A portion of the book's proceeds will go to service organizations, including the U.S. Dream Academy, which helps children of incarcerated parents.)

Looking back, Mary Moore says, "there are a lot of things I would do differently. I was a young mom when I had Tony and Wes (who had different fathers). I know a lot more now than I did then so I can navigate for my grandchildren."

There are five **other** fatherless children in this story: Bruce Prothero's. Moore says that the only victims in The Other Wes Moore are Prothero, who was 35 when he was killed, and his family. Working a second job as a security guard at a Baltimore-area jewelry store on Feb. 7, 2000, Prothero chased the four robbers and was gunned down by Tony Moore, who died at Jessup two years ago at 38 of kidney failure.

"Bruce Prothero was a genuine hero," the author says. "**Wes Moore** is where he needs to be. His decisions and actions put him there" in prison.

In an e-mail, Sue Nickerson, president of the Maryland Chapter of Concerns of Police Survivors, said: "The family of Sgt. Bruce Prothero has for the past several months wished that this not become a public issue again. ... The Maryland Chapter of Concerns of Police Survivors will respect the privacy and wishes of his wife. We will not be making a statement on this."

Looking at the writer **Wes Moore** today, it's hard to imagine that when he was 12, his distraught mother asked her parents to take out a loan so she could send her son away.

"It was one of the hardest things I've ever done," says Joy Moore, 60.

After her husband's death, Moore moved Wes and his two sisters into the Bronx home of her parents, Jamaican immigrants. (She later remarried and divorced in the 1990s.)

When Wes was 6, his mother enrolled him in the elite Riverdale Country School. It was a disaster. By 12, he had been suspended for fighting, regularly skipped school and was picked up by cops for spraying graffiti. "I was filled with rage," says Moore, who says he fit in neither with his Bronx neighbors nor his wealthy classmates.

With her parents' money, Joy Moore sent her son to Valley Forge Military Academy, an all-male Pennsylvania boarding school. He thrived there, becoming a second lieutenant in the Army at 18.

What might have been

It's impossible to sit with Moore and not think about the current resident of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, who explored his own father issues in his best seller, Dreams From My Father.

**Moore** is mum on whether he harbors political ambitions. "You don't have to be in politics to serve," says the author, who lives in New Jersey with his wife and now works at Citigroup in Manhattan as a global strategist.
At 6 p.m., with the sun turning the improbably beautiful prison a shade of gold, Moore points to a separate parking lot. "It's Friday night. That'll be filling up soon."

The most disheartening thing about his visits to Jessup has never been the inmates, he says. It's the women and children in the visitors' room. Had he not had a devoted family and demanding mentors, it might have been his mom, grandmother and sisters passing through the metal detector tonight at Jessup.

"So little separates us from another life altogether," Moore says before he drives away to a life of freedom, and accomplishment.

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THE OTHER
WES MOORE:
One Name and
Two Fates.
By Wes Moore.
Spiegel & Grau.
233 pp. $25

Fatherhood is a touchy subject among black American men. Well over half of black kids grow up in a household without a dad. No wonder black public figures ranging from Louis Farrakhan to Bill Cosby to President Barack Obama have exhorted black men to "step up" and be responsible fathers. Some liberal advocates dismiss these pleas as bootstrap sermons that blame poor blacks for systemic problems. Others, conservative and liberal alike, counter that the three pillars that once bolstered black Americans-community, school, and family-are now miserably failing at-risk black kids, not least because of the plague of deadbeat dads.

The Other Wes Moore chronicles the parallel lives of two black men from Baltimore's hardscrabble turf. The author overcomes his financially challenged, fatherless childhood to become a husband, Rhodes Scholar, White House fellow, and investment banker. The "other" Wes Moore, who is two years older, emerges from a financially challenged, fatherless childhood to receive a life-without-parole sentence for his role in a cop slaying during a botched robbery in 2000. It's as if Pudd'nhead Wilson met The Prince and the Pauper on the streets of black America. How did these two men wind up in such radically different places?

Moore interweaves their stories in an elegant narrative, bobbing between living rooms, basketball courts, alleys, lawns, stoops, and, most important, the prison visiting room where he interviews the other Wes Moore, whose existence the author discovered in a newspaper story about the robbery. It was not random events that launched these boys on dramatically different paths. Rather, it was the influence of adults. At the most vulnerable moments in his life, members of the author's family doubled down to make sure he was properly supervised, and made prescient, commonsense decisions, such as sending him to military school after a minor brush with the law. Meanwhile, the other Wes Moore's family made spectacularly poor decisions in the face of already meager options. His older brother dealt drugs, survived three gunshot wounds, then earnestly begged Wes not to do as he had done. Wes's mother kept weed in the house, then acted shocked to discover her son's drug stash.
The incarcerated Wes Moore's story doesn't deliver anywhere near the high-stakes drama seen in gritty entertainments such as the HBO crime series The Wire or last year's film Precious. The realities of his four out-of-wedlock children, drug dealing, and gang-banging exploits make for a tale that is flat and rather familiar, his biography one more episode in the media's narrative of black pathology. As Obama noted in The Audacity of Hope, "The images of the so-called underclass are ubiquitous, a permanent fixture in American popular culture."

The author's story, on the other hand, reads like an original road map of the contemporary striver's path to the mandarin class. Moore is a modern-day Horatio Alger whooshing through the revolving doors of military enlistment, public service, and global finance. The coming-of-age memoir that inspired him was not The Autobiography of Malcolm X but Colin Powell's My American Journey. That's no accident. Like Powell and Obama, the author is the child of an immigrant. The contrast between his story and the other Wes Moore's is explained in part by the different experiences of black immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean and native-born black Americans, who on average have lower educational attainment, lower incomes, and higher incarceration rates.

Wes Moore is an artful storyteller, but he's not a particularly fine writer. His sentences are pocked with clichés along the lines of "that fateful day." Particularly grating is his habit of giving women eyes that "twinkled," are "scintillating," or are "almond-shaped." This is not just sloppy writing; Moore's idolatry of women lets them off the hook in this tale of social woe. While he often castigates men for their personal deficiencies, he glosses over the serial pregnancies of many black women who are not equipped to raise the kids they conceive.

However, insights and graceful sentences punctuate the often mediocre writing. After his father's death, Moore's mother moved the family to the Bronx, where, he writes, "the idea of life's impermanence underlined everything for kids my age-it drove some of us to a paralyzing apathy, stopped us from even thinking too far into the future. Others were driven to what, in retrospect, was a sort of permanent state of mourning: for our loved ones, who always seemed at risk, and for our own lives, which felt so fragile and vulnerable." The book's chief triumph is to capture so matter-of-factly the permanent state of mourning experienced by an entire generation of black men who grew up without fathers.

Reviewed by Rich Benjamin

Rich Benjamin is the author of Searching for Whitopia: An Improbable Journey to the Heart of White America, which earned a 2009 Editor's Choice award from Booklist/The American Library Association. He is a senior fellow at Demos, a nonpartisan think tank.

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