***The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates.* By Wes Moore. Spiegel &Grau Trade Paperback. New York 2011.**

**Thesis**: One of the most powerful influences on a child’s life is his family.

 “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 Destinies of Two Men Who share One Name. Heard on NPR Author Interview April 28, 2010, <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=126370229&t=1552941558270>    Last accessed August 17, 2020, Heard on All Things Considered. National Public Radio (NPR) Broadcast Melissa Black Host.

The naming of one’s child is an individual and significant moment. Who were the parents of each child named Wes Moore? Did the story of their parents influence the life story of the boys? Both boys were born in Baltimore, Maryland, and each grew up without a father’s guidance. Was the absence of a father part of the circumstances that influenced the boys to make the decisions they did? The questions the author asks in this narrative are the factors that help determine one’s life choices. Who is responsible for the choices we make? The author Wes Moore presents the circumstances, conditions, and significant events of his and Wes Moore – the prisoner’s life. They both grew up without a father’s hand to guide them through their years of age in the ghettos of Baltimore, Maryland, and the Bronx, New York. They each sought the companionship and camaraderie of friends and family. Wes Moore, the inmate, was born to a single mother who did not have the needed financial support to complete college. Nor did her life choices demonstrate the ability to make the sensible decisions required to move her and her sons out of the various Baltimore ghetto housing environments.

Although the author’s mother was devastated and depressed by her productive husband’s medically misdiagnosed illness that resulted in his premature death, she realized that to move ahead and rear her children; she would need the help of her parents. So, she moved into her parents’ home. Upon returning to her childhood home in the Bronx, Joy, the author’s mother, observed that the neighborhood she grew up in had become a ghetto and she did not leave her son and daughters to roam its streets unsupervised. The children’s grandparents immigrated from Jamaica so that Wes’s Grandfather could attend college. The same discipline and strong belief in the family that they used to rear their children they used to helped look after their grandchildren. Joy inherited that same determination, and while her parents kept a firm eye on her children, she worked long hours to provide the financing for private school education for her children.

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The author describes how the environment of the streets influenced both boys. Neither boy was serious about an education and their friends became their support. During his prison visits with the author, Wes Moore, the inmate, described how he looked up to his older brother Tony. Although Tony, a drug dealer himself, did his best to tell his younger brother the dangers and results of using and dealing drugs, his warnings fell on deaf ears. The young Wes was impressed by the money and influence that dealing provided. He thrived on its adventures, dangers, and possibilities and soon became a successful dealer with his personal territory. Wes, the inmate, walked away from his mother and into his own life. He became an unsuccessful father and husband, and continued to make unfortunate choices. Wes blamed others and never took responsibility for his own decisions. He never took responsibility for his failures or believed in his success.

Wes’s friend Levy persuaded and pushed Wes to join the Job Corps. They both passed the entrance test and other requirements and boarded the bus to the Job Corp Center and road to a new outlook. Wes, the inmate, graduated from the Job Corps’ disciplined life, and upon graduation, found himself with the skills and training of a professional carpenter. Wes was motivated to turn to a new and different lifestyle, but his arrest record for drugs, dealing, and battery haunted him, and he was unable to find a job.

Life circumstances also removed Wes, the author, from the neighborhood streets and its influences. Wes’s mother enrolled her children in Riverdale Country School, but he was never entirely comfortable there. The school’s white culture was foreign, and he never understood how to interact within its environment. His grades declined, he skipped classes and soon became involved with petty crimes. Joy threatened to send Wes to Military School. When Joy received a phone call telling her that Wes was on academic and disciplinary probation due to his lack of interest in learning and unconstructive behavior, Joy made good on her threats and enrolled her son at Valley Forge Military Academy.

The author first fought his situation at Valley Forge Military Academy, but his mother instilled in him that he had no choice but to grow up, accept responsibility and appreciate the sacrifices that others made for him. Wes More realized that growing up and becoming a man is deciding to take responsibility for oneself. Wes’s days at Valley Forge Military Academy taught him to live up to the expectations that others placed on him. Growing up means holding oneself accountable for one’s own choices.

The author finished college at Valley Forge Military Academy and became an officer in the United States Army. He became a combat veteran, Rhodes Scholar, and White House Fellow. His search for meaning took him to the continents of Africa, Europe, and Asia.

 Wes, the inmate, spent his 32nd birthday in prison, and shortly afterwards the author visited him. The reported conversation between them was significant. See (Moore p.67)

**Wes: When did you feel like you became a man? Wes asked me, a troubled look on his face**

**Author: I think it was when I first felt accountable to people other than just myself. When I first cared that my actions mattered to people other than myself. I answered quickly and confidently … But for some of us, the promotion to adulthood, or at least its challenges, is so jarring, so sudden, that we enter it unprepared and might be undone by it. Wes feeding off my answer, attempting to finish my thought.**

**Wes: Providing for others isn’t easy. And the mistakes you make trying are unforgiving.**

**Author: what do you mean?**

**Wes:**And second chances are pretty fleeting.

# Moore, the author, continued to compare events between his life and that the incarcerated Wes Moore’s life. Moore covers the details of the jewelry store robbery that led to the killing of a police officer and the subsequent capture, trial, and incarceration of the four men who committed the robbery. The author related to readers the events that led to his nomination and receipt of a Rhodes Scholarship and the details of a chance to study and live with a host family in South Africa that was a part of his studies.

# The book’s epilogue updated the life, thoughts, feelings and lives of the family members of Wes Moore, the prisoner. The author revealed that his life events are not perfect and that he will always feel his father’s loss. Writing this story connected him with his father. “My father was a journalist, and I hope that in some way this journey has proved that as my mother says, I honestly, inherited his passion for getting the story right.” Moore (p.178.) As he traveled around the country speaking with people, he encouraged them to share their stories and the stories of the *Wes’s*they knew. People asked him, “What made the difference” He replied, “I don’t know. The answer is elusive.”

He points out that no one thing guides or moves people in one direction or another. What is essential is the availability of role models for young people-- role models that “look like” them and that they can identify with. People must be surrounded by others who actively support them and are willing to force them in the right direction. Being surrounded by empowered and enabled people are all substantial factors. Plus, a necessary piece of life is to have the resources, tools, and means to move in the right direction.

Wes’s mother pushed him, and guided her son’s education. While enrolled at Valley Forge MilitaryAcademy**,** Wes read Colin Powell’s book*, My American Journey: An* *Autobiography.* It was this story, the story of a boy reared in the Bronx, who was the son of Jamaican parents that taught him who he could be. It is the story of a black man, a United States Army General Colin Powell, who inspired him to serve his country as an army paratrooper.

The book The Other Wes Moore also includes an interview between the author and novelist Farai Chideya. \*\* Included at the end are discussion questions and a Resource Guide to Organizations and Agencies that offer support to children and families.

\*\*The meeting was initially published in SMITH Magazine on June 22, 2010.

<http://www.smithmag.net/>

\*\* [http://www.smithmag.net/memoirville/2010/06/22/interview-wes-moore-author-of-the-other-wes- moore-one-name-two-fates/](http://www.smithmag.net/memoirville/2010/06/22/interview-wes-moore-author-of-the-other-wes-%20%20%20moore-one-name-two-fates/)