

# **The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates Study Guide**

**The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates by Wes Moore**

(c)2017 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



# Contents

<a href="#">The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Section I: Chapter 1.....</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">Section II: Chapter 2.....</a>	<a href="#">9</a>
<a href="#">Section III: Chapter 3.....</a>	<a href="#">12</a>
<a href="#">Section IV: Chapter 4.....</a>	<a href="#">15</a>
<a href="#">Section V: Chapter 5.....</a>	<a href="#">18</a>
<a href="#">Section VI: Chapter 6.....</a>	<a href="#">22</a>
<a href="#">Section VII: Chapter 7.....</a>	<a href="#">25</a>
<a href="#">Section VIII: Chapter 8.....</a>	<a href="#">29</a>
<a href="#">Important People.....</a>	<a href="#">33</a>
<a href="#">Objects/Places.....</a>	<a href="#">36</a>
<a href="#">Themes.....</a>	<a href="#">38</a>
<a href="#">Styles.....</a>	<a href="#">42</a>
<a href="#">Quotes.....</a>	<a href="#">44</a>
<a href="#">Topics for Discussion.....</a>	<a href="#">47</a>

# Summary

This study guide refers to the following version of the book: *The Other Wes Moore*, by Wes Moore, New York: Spiegel & Grau, an imprint of Random House, 2010.

The book is broken up into eight chapters. Each chapter represents a slice of life of both men in a single given year. The first half of the chapter describes what one man was doing in this year, and the second half of the chapter checks in on the other man. To avoid confusion in this section of the study guide, both men's lives will be discussed separately.

In the book, the author refers to himself as "I" and to the other Wes Moore as "Wes." In this summary, the Wes Moore who went to prison will also be referred to as "Wes." The author will be referred to as "Moore" when the summary describes what is happening in the book. The author will be described as "the author" when style and technique are analyzed.

Moore was born Westley Watende Omari Moore in a neighborhood that bordered Maryland and Washington, D.C. His parents were news writers. His father died when he was very young after contracting a rare, deadly virus. The hospital staff had not taken him seriously, possibly because he was black. He died partially because of negligence and partially because of racism.

His mother worked hard to send him to private school. This was the first time Moore learned that there were other ways people lived. There were rich kids here, and he had to be two different people: the good kid at school and the tough kid on the street.

He did not fit in at that school too well. He yearned to be a tough street kid, and even had invented a street name and graffiti tag. He was arrested for graffiti while hanging out with a low-level dealer friend of his. The cops cuffed them and threw them in the back seat of the car. They gave the kids a few minutes to think about it, then talked to them. They gave the kids a warning to get smart and stay out of this lifestyle or it will only get worse. Moore was terrified, but not for long. He continued to push the limits.

He was in too much trouble at school and at home, and so his mother made a difficult decision. She asked for money from family and sent him to military school. Moore was miserable. He did not like the regulations, the authority, or being away from home. He tried to run away multiple times. He would always get caught. At one point, he called his mother and begged her to bring him home. His mother was strong and refused.

Eventually, though, Moore grew to enjoy his time at military school. He even rose up through the ranks. With a lot of help from role models above him in the line of command, he felt empowered for the first time in his life. He had begun to think about the future. The only down side is that the outside world was still the same. One night, walking through town, he was attacked for being black.



Moore chose the military as his first career. It would be a safe place to continue his training and travel the world. He went on to travel to South Africa, work in the military and in politics. While Wes was working the streets of Baltimore, Moore was working in the mayor's office. He spoke at the Democrat national convention before Barack Obama accepted the nomination to run for president. He married. He worked in Wall Street, fought in the military in Afghanistan, and was special assistant to Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice.

Wes was born in Baltimore, in the same area that his parents and grandparents lived. They were in a bad neighborhood that his mother kept trying to get them out of. She never succeeded. He had a half-brother, Tony, that he looked up to. Wes' father showed up only a few times in his life, and was usually drunk.

Wes had been arrested for the first time when he was eight years old for pulling a knife on another boy during a dispute playing street football. Tony and Tony's father covered it up, never letting their mother know. A few years later, Wes joined up with some dealers. He became a look-out for them. Around this time, he started using marijuana, and started to understand how people would want to pay money for a good feeling.

Finally, he started selling drugs as well. The money coming into the household was significant. His mother turned a blind eye to it. She believed his innocence because she had no other choice. This was her baby, and she could not bear to think that no matter what she did, both of her sons would turn out to be dealers.

Wes ventured further into the drug trade, working his way up the chain. The violent lifestyle escalated until he was arrested for shooting at a rival. It was not a drug rival, but the cousin of a girl with whom he was involved. He was already a father and had tried to kill someone and he was still a teenager.

He was tried as a juvenile and released soon after. But he was not out long. He was a lieutenant in the drug trade, with a crew of his own. At its peak, it would bring in \$4,000 a day. Nothing was ever enough, though. He made a stupid mistake and sold to an undercover cop. He went back to jail.

Eventually, the drug trade was too much for him. He was sick of putting his life on the line, but knew no other way to support himself and his family (he now had four children with two different mothers). He joined Job Corps with a friend, Levy, who also used to be a dealer. He excelled at Job Corps, learned carpentry, and earned his GED. However, after a string of temporary jobs, none of them paying more than \$9 an hour, he went back to dealing.

Soon after that he was arrested along with Tony and two other men who are unnamed by the author. Four suspects had held a jewelry store up, making off with \$438,000 in product. An off-duty police officer, 35-year-old Bruce Prothero, was working security there to make enough money to support his five children. Prothero followed the robbers out, and was gunned down in the parking lot. Tony was later identified as the shooter, but all four men, including Wes, were charged with the crime and given life sentences.



# Section 1: Chapter 1

## Summary

In the Introduction, Moore gives an overview about how he came upon the subject of the book and what he hoped to learn. It began when the same newspaper ran two articles about two people with the same name. The articles about the two Wes Moores appeared close together in the year 2000. The one about him told about his being named a Rhodes scholar. The one about the other Wes Moore was about a jewelry store heist that went wrong. An off-duty police officer working as a security guard was killed. Bruce Prothero pursued the men into the parking lot where he was shot. A manhunt ensued for the five men involved in the heist.

Two years later, the coincidence of the two names continued to haunt the author. Finally, he wrote to his double. The other Wes wrote back, and they began a correspondence. They eventually met in person.

The author then explains how he conducted research for the book. It is the product of hundreds of hours of interviews. Some names have been changed to protect people. Some characters are composites of several people. Nevertheless, the feel and the facts have not changed.

He also takes this time to make himself clear that he is not using the book to exonerate the criminal, but to explain the situations that helped create him. The author also wrote about not wanting to take away from the pain that he caused the family of the officer who was killed.

Part 1 is titled "Fathers and Angels." The events begin in Jessup Correctional Institution, where Wes was incarcerated. Moore drove from his Baltimore home to central Maryland to visit him. They talked through telephones with bulletproof glass between them. They talked about fathers. Wes' father left early. Moore's died. As Moore questioned Wes, Wes turned the tables on him, and started asking questions instead. He asked Moore if he missed his father, and the answer was yes; but, he did not know why, because he did not remember him very much.

The first section takes place in 1982. Moore grew up in a home at the corner of two different towns, which he alluded would be important later. They were in Maryland and Washington, D.C. Moore was three years old, playing with his older sister, Nikki, who was ten. They were teasing each other playfully when Moore hit her. His mother, Joy, saw this and screamed at him. He had been on the receiving end of her beating before, and he was terrified. His father, also named Wes Moore, calmed her down.

Moore's full name was Westley Watende Omari Moore. His two middle names meant, respectively, "revenge will not be sought" and "the highest." Nikki was actually named



Joy, but she went by a different name. There was a third child in the family named Shani.

Joy Thomas' family came from Jamaica, living on a family farm for generations. Her father saved up enough money to move to America so he could study theology. Joy grew up in the Bronx, New York, trying to fit in to American way of life. She attended American University, and married a man named Bill. They were both too young to be married, and Bill's drug and alcohol use became a problem. He started becoming abusive. One night, Bill yelled at her to do the dishes. While she was trying to calm him down so he would not wake their baby (Nikki), he threw her to the ground. The beating continued until she got a hold of a kitchen knife and threatened him. She and Nikki left him soon after.

The author brings the reader back to his childhood. His father came to speak with him after he hit Nikki. His father was calm and told him why hitting girls was wrong. Then, he led him downstairs and had him apologize.

His father was a reporter who hosted a public affairs television show. He met Joy when she was hired as a writer for the show. One night, in 1982, he came home after feeling unwell for most of the day. He tried to take medicine, but the pill got caught in his throat and would not go down. In the middle of the night, he went to the hospital alone. The doctors there could not find anything wrong with him, and sent him home. The questions they had asked Joy suggested that they thought he was making up his condition. He died within five hours of being released. He had contracted a rare virus called epiglottitis, which made his throat close. Therefore, his death was caused by self-suffocation. Moore wrote that a black man coming into a hospital in the middle of the night, unshaven, and looking disoriented, was probably laughed off, when a white person, or a person who was well dressed, would have had their situation taken more seriously.

Wes' story also began in 1982. He was being sent to see his father's mother, who was babysitting while his mother went out. She was crying, because she had just received word that the grant that paid for her tuition at Johns Hopkins University was cut. She was the first in her family to attend college, but after just 16 credits, the aid program had been slashed by then-President Ronald Reagan.

Getting this education was important to his mother, Mary. She was a child when Baltimore erupted in riots after the death of Martin Luther King Jr. As a teen, she had worked in a grocery store owned by a black couple, showing a level of financial independence rare for African-Americans in those days. All she knew was that she had to get her and her family out of the poor neighborhood.

Mary had grown up in a row house in Baltimore, one of eight children. The family was able to rent the large home at a discount because the previous owner had been murdered by her husband. At 16, she got pregnant with her first child, Tony. Her mother said she would stay in school and go to college. After Tony was born, Mary found herself having trouble raising the boy. The boy's father wanted nothing to do with him.



Mary's father was unhelpful. Mary's mother had been receiving dialysis. She went into the hospital for a kidney transplant and did not survive the procedure. Her father, a functioning alcoholic, got drunk and called the kids together to tell them the news: "Sorry, guys, Mom's dead," (22).

Mary met Wes' father, Bernard, at her job. She was a secretary for Bayview Medical Center. They dated briefly, and had broken up before Wes was even born. He was a drinker, like Tony's father was, and did not stay in the picture. There was just one time he tried to make an appearance. He was drunk and started banging on the front door, demanding to see his son. No one opened the door for him and he went away, never to try again.

Bernard's parents, on the other hand, welcomed Wes into the family with open arms. He loved being with his grandmother Mamie, and felt real love there. The narrative returned to the story of Mary dropping Wes off at Mamie's for the night so she could blow off steam with her girlfriends. Wes ran into the house and stopped short when he saw a man he had never seen before inside, stinking of whiskey. Mary, not knowing he was going to be there, had to introduce Wes to his father.

## Analysis

The author tries to sum up early childhood with a cross section of just one year. He does this by writing a few flashbacks. Even though the chapter is tied to the year 1982, he sums up the important family history leading up to that moment. This year, 1982, is chosen by the author because two very important paternal things happen to both men: Moore's father died and Wes met his for the first time. Moore's father exited Moore's life; Wes' father entered Wes' life.

The backstories of both families are told because it is important to ground both men into the environment in which they were raised. The author clearly believes that nurture has a great deal of influence on a developing child, more than, perhaps, nature. Therefore, the immediate family structure needs to be established in the opening chapter of the book.

A major theme is addressed at this point. People are born into legacies, and they have to learn about where they stand in them. For example, both of Moore's parents wrote news. It is therefore not surprising that when he set out to write a book about himself and the other Wes Moore. He is taking the next natural step in his legacy. Wes, meanwhile, did not know his father, and his mother raised him in a poor, violent neighborhood. In fact, his mother grew up in a house where the previous owner had been murdered. He inherited a legacy of poverty, violence, and absent male role models. It is therefore not surprising that he got involved in drugs and violence. He was taking the next step in his legacy.

The author refers to the riots in Baltimore with a capital R. He does this to underscore their importance, like World War II.



The author tells the story about hitting his older sister for two purposes. One, he uses it to delve into his mother's backstory of being a victim of physical abuse. Two, he uses it to show his father's reaction to violence: to talk it through and apologize when wrong. This is shown in stark contrast to Wes' childhood, where violence was everywhere. While some encouraged it, some just looked the other way.

The author calls this first chapter "Fathers and Angels" because of the important influence that fathers have on their sons. That only takes the first half of the title. The second half, "angels," is not as clearly defined. It could be argued that the angels have to do with the fact that Moore's father died. However, it could be determined that the angels in this title were the long-suffering mothers of both men who had to endure domestic violence, street violence, riots, and other tribulations trying to raise boys right in a very difficult world.

## Vocabulary

diaphanous, swaths, arable, assimilation, parquet, voyeuristic, inflection, diverge, prestigious, phalanx, conspiratorial, melodramatic, narcissistic, self-indulgent, presumptuous





## Section II: Chapter 2

### Summary

Chapter 2 is titled "In Search of Home." The events occur in 1984. Wes is eight years old.

Wes' family was moved several times, each time to avoid a bad person or a bad neighborhood. Tony, his older brother, became a parental unit when his mother was working, which was a lot. However, Tony was hanging around Tony's father's projects. He had become a dealer before he was ten. Now fourteen, Tony had earned his reputation in at least one shootout. He had an ice grille, a face with dead, cold eyes but one that would be known to express fire. But he kept trying to keep his little brother out of the action. Wes did not appreciate this, thinking Tony was being a hypocrite.

Wes was not doing well in school, but he was doing well in football. He was athletic, and big for his age. He quickly befriended another boy on the team, Woody, and they became really close. Woody had something that Wes wanted, parents who were together. They also had a token white friend Paul, whose nickname was permanently White Boy.

Woody called Wes to join a street football game. They were a rowdy bunch, and the neighborhood resented their loud vulgarity and messiness. They picked a group to play. Wes was an aggressive player, and one boy he was covering called him out on it. They were soon chest to chest, threatening and cursing at each other. The boy, who was smaller, punched Wes and split his lip. Everyone expected a fight. Wes ran home instead, but it was to get a knife.

The author switched to a scene where Tony would take Wes and Woody to the Murphy Homes projects, where his father lived. It was nicknamed the Murder Homes. Tony would have his boys circle them, then call a few out to fight. He was toughening up his brother, training him to handle the tough street kids he would eventually face.

Although that training was not meant for Wes to settle a small football dispute, that was what was about to happen. Wes felt like he needed to send a message that he was not to be disrespected. The only choice he knew was to escalate violence, not to de-escalate violence. Woody had followed Wes home and tried to stop him. Wes tricked him and ran past. He did not know that in the meantime, someone had called the police on the boys. Wes found the boy and came at him with a knife. He did not hear the police officer call out to him. Suddenly he was lifted up and slammed onto a police cruiser's hood. He was arrested and taken to jail. Tony's father got him out. It would be years before Mary found out that Wes had been arrested for almost stabbing another boy when he was 8.



Moore's father's death could have created a wrongful death case, and his mother considered it. However, a long legal battle was not what the family needed. She settled out of court instead. Moore's mother used some of the money to set up a fund to supply first responders with lifesaving care that could have saved his father's life. None of those who responded had that training.

Not coping well with her husband's death, his mother decided to move the family back to her own mother's home in the Bronx, New York. It was 1984. Although his mother had wonderful memories growing up there, the neighborhood had changed. It was no longer the safe community she remembered. Moore's grandparents were just as he remembered, though: loving, energetic, and spoiling. They had met when his grandmother Winell, then aged 6, came with her family from Cuba to Jamaica. They were new parishioners at a church, and the son of the minister was his grandfather. They grew up together and got married. His grandfather, James, was the first black minister in the history of the Dutch Reformed Church. While studying for the ministry, James befriended a man who later became the first black president of Ghana.

His grandparents' rules were strict, and they superseded his mother's. One of them was that when the street lights came on, he had to head home. One day, he was allowed to walk to the park to play basketball. He saw he was outclassed by the street players, but still stepped up to try. He did not do well, but he was welcomed into the group. The basketball court was like nothing he had ever seen, where people of all walks of life stopped what they were doing to play. He would regularly see kids like him, kids in church clothes, dealers, the occasional inmate who was just released, and even a postal employee taking a break from work. The person's background did not matter. This was a neutral territory to just play.

## Analysis

The author speaks about how young, inner city kids do not know how to deal with depression and anger. When things are tough, they lash out. That is the only answer to the problem for them. Wes did not learn how to avoid the confrontation with the other boy in the street football game. He only learned how to escalate problems. It is probably because his closest teacher was Tony, who was known as a tough kid who never backed down.

The author builds Wes' motivation very carefully. Using just one day in his life, albeit a very important one, the author sets the stage for the rest of his life. The reader could imagine that the day where Wes is involved in a murder will play out the same way. He would be in over his head, and seek an extreme answer to a situation rather than a calm and rational one.

Perhaps, this chapter uses foreshadowing more than any other chapters. As the author slowly sifts through Wes' life, there were plenty of days from which to choose. This one was picked because it was Wes' first time to choose violence as an answer. It was his



first arrest as well. Every chapter will have something leading up to that fateful final arrest, but this one feels like a line has been crossed.

The author includes his family history to show that he comes from a family of leaders. His father was a respected journalist, with his own show. His grandfather was the first black minister in the Dutch Reformed Church, who was friends at one time with the future president of Ghana. This is not merely bragging. This is done to show there is a legacy here. By comparison, Wes did not have a legacy in his family. At least, not a good one. There were no leaders in Wes' family.

In Chapter 2, both boys play a street sport, but with wildly different results. Wes' game ends with him getting arrested. Moore's ends with a poetic appreciation for the game and his fellow players. The author does this to show the contrast in how the boys spent their time. Whereas Moore's basketball court was a neutral territory for all to enjoy, Wes' football games were an arena for kids to prove themselves and try to dominate each other.

Though the author chooses 1984 for this chapter's slice of life, for Moore it could have been any year. Nothing of particular importance happens to Moore during this time, except moving to his grandparents. However, the year 1984 was Wes' first arrest. Perhaps, by showing nothing particularly happening in his own childhood, the author is displaying the contrast between the two of them in this period of time. Wes had a very significant year, and Moore had a typical year for a typical, good kid.

## Vocabulary

façade, stanching, gangsta, fastidiously, postapocalyptic, phenoms



## Section III: Chapter 3

### Summary

Chapter 3 is called "Foreign Ground."

The first part of Chapter 3 is Moore's story. Moore and a friend, Justin, were spending the day in Manhattan, then took the bus back to the Bronx. They went to Riverdale Country School together, a private school. Moore's mother worked multiple jobs so that her son would not go to the public schools with their gangs and drugs. John F. Kennedy had been an alumnus.

One of Moore's friends, Paris, asked "How y'all like it up at that white school? (49)" Moore knew the school carried a stigma in his hood, so he answered carefully. He had been suspended for fighting recently. It was just some playful roughhousing when he hurt his friend's head. Moore built the story up, saying that the kid disrespected him and got in his face. Moore's friend, Justin, who also went to Riverdale, had a look on his face that showed he knew it was a lie. Moore was then ridiculed by his friends for making up the story.

The two different worlds were starting to gnaw at Moore. His grades were slipping. "I was becoming too "rich" for the kids from the neighborhood and too "poor" for the kids at school" (53). He complained to Justin about how he felt out of place everywhere, and about how he never saw his mother, and all of the other problems he was going through. Justin did not buy it. Justin was going through the same things and his grades were good. He was able to adapt well to the dichotomy. Moore said his mother was talking about sending him to military school.

Wes and his family moved to Dundee Village, a neighborhood in Baltimore County, part of a flight of people leaving the city. Tony, at 18, was a veteran of the drug trade. He spent most of his time between his girlfriend's apartment and his father's apartment. He had been shot during a botched drug deal. It would wind up being the first of three times he would be shot in his life. He had dropped out of school. Wes flunked sixth grade. Mary, their mother, was feeling that she had already lost Tony, but she still wanted to save Wes. Wes saw a kid wearing a cool headset and a diamond ring. He asked where he could get one. The kid told him all he had to do was stand somewhere and keep an eye out for police. If he saw them, he would have to push a button and say something, which would tip off the dealers. He was failing in school, and he did not have anything else to do. There was nothing for him to do until he became a professional football player or rapper, which were the only goals he had.

"This game didn't require studying or exams. It didn't require a degree or vocational skills. All he needed was ambition. And guts. And, as Wes was soon to understand, an ability to live with constant fear" (58).



The story then drops back to an earlier time, when Wes skipped school to host a barbecue at his house for his friends, who were also skipping school. Rummaging through his mother's things to steal loose change, he stumbled across a small bag of marijuana. Instead of a barbecue, they all got high instead. Between that and the malt liquor they drank with it, Wes felt horrible. He had overdone it on his first try. The author does not say how old he was in this part of the story. His mother and her boyfriend figured out he had gotten drunk, but they did not find out about the marijuana right away. When they were thinking it was just about getting drunk, she enjoyed talking loudly and teasing him about it, thinking that this terrible experience would keep him away from liquor. However, inside, Wes felt freedom while high. He understood its power, and how people would pay for that kind of feeling. He felt like he had matured and reached a new step.

## Analysis

The author off-handedly mentions JFK as a graduate of his school. This is not to impress. He is not dropping names. He is explaining the ivy league starter kit where he was enrolled. It is also to talk about legacies. He is in the company of the powerful elite, even if it is only by association of where he went to school. The point the author is trying to make is that the private school churns out people like presidents. Anyone associated with that school would have a good reputation.

However, this has the opposite effect on his group of friends. They see Riverdale as a joke. A "white school." They have little respect for him. Showing this juxtaposition, JFK and Moore's friends, the author shows that different groups have different feelings for legacy. To the upper class, Riverdale would be a sense of pride. To the lower class, it is something to be ashamed of.

Going to a private school taught Moore that there were different kinds of people in the world, and that the rich kids act differently than the poor kids.

The author does not let himself off easily. When he is caught in a lie, he writes about how obvious the lie is. When he complains about his situation to Justin, he writes about how these were all excuses. The author does not give himself a break for his difficult past. He does not accept that his behavior was dictated by his surroundings. It hints that he does not accept that Wes' behavior was dictated by his surroundings.

The juxtaposition of these the two parts of the third chapter both show important elements in shaping the two men. The third chapter focuses on their early decisions and how they interact with their surroundings. Both boys had similar desires to belong, and strange neighborhoods with difficult rules to learn. They go about it two different ways. Moore wanted to be left alone by the dangerous elements in town. Wes wanted to be on top of them. Of all the stories that the author could have used, he chose these because they illustrate the very beginning of how these two people are going to see the world. These furtive first decisions would come to guide their thoughts into their adulthood.



In Wes' part of the third chapter, the author shows his mother performing triage. She felt that she had already lost Tony to the hood, so she moved to a nicer area and worked hard so that Wes would not fall into the same trap. When Wes became sick from drinking, his mother laughed it off as she thought it was only liquor. Other boys Wes' age were into much worse things. So, she thought it was going to be a learning experience for him. This showed how she was choosing her battles and letting some bad things happen because it could always be worse.

The author named this chapter "Foreign Ground" because in both sections, the boys were in unfamiliar geography. Moore went to a different school. Wes moved to a different neighborhood. Both of them were taking these times to learn more about their surroundings.

## Vocabulary

rep, jawing, rock (as in crack), idiosyncrasies, metastasizing, bucolic, tableau, dap, conspiratorial, fade (as in haircut)



## Section IV: Chapter 4

### Summary

The second part of the book is titled "Choices and Second Chances." It opens with Moore visiting Wes in prison, and wishing him a happy birthday. Wes was born on Independence Day. Moore reflected on the other visitations going on around him. They made him thankful for his freedom. He felt sympathy for those incarcerated, but did not forgive them for their sins. To him, they "squandered the few opportunities they'd had" (67).

The conversations between Moore and Wes had changed over time. In the beginning, they were very general, telling the other very safe things. Now, they had become a joint therapy session. Wes asked Moore when did he first become a man. It made Moore think, and inspired the next few chapters. Moore declared, without any real detail, that adulthood was: "When I first cared that my actions mattered to people other than just me" (66).

The two men discussed second chances. Wes said that both of them had made some bad decisions, but there was a major difference between them. Moore had a safety net and Wes did not. "But if the situation or the context where you make the decisions don't change, then second chances don't mean too much, huh?" (66).

Moore admitted that he did have a different background. Both men felt they would always have another chance if they failed. However, Moore was right in that he always had more chances. Wes was wrong. "I guess it's hard sometimes to distinguish between second chances and last chances," (67).

The fourth chapter is titled "Marking Territory," and it takes place in 1990.

Tony went back to Wes' house and noticed a stack of shoe boxes in his little brother's room. Tony had been a player in the drug trade for a decade now. He knew that the only way Wes could get that kind of money was dealing. Wes had created a story about DJing in the neighborhood and making that money. His mother believed it, partially because she wanted to. The two brothers came to blows over it. Tony literally tried to beat some sense into Wes before their mother broke it up. Tony asked her how stupid she could be to believe that story about him being a DJ. Mary said "Well, that's what he told me, and I believe him" (71). Her doubts were peeking through, but she kept with it. Tony had enough. He swore that was the last time he would try to talk Wes out of the game. He left.

Mary took Wes back into the house and nursed his wounds, apologizing for Tony's violence. Wes felt horrible that he had betrayed his mother, but it did not change anything about his behavior.





However, Mary's behavior changed. Tony had let that seed of doubt grow within her. She searched his room and found his drugs. She was heartbroken and felt betrayed. After wallowing in misery for a while, she flushed all the drugs.

When Wes came home, he was saddened to see the boxes where he kept the drugs on his bed. He knew he had been caught. Then when he opened them and saw them empty, he flew into a rage. His mother had thrown out more than \$4,000 worth of product. She was unapologetic. She told him very calmly but clearly that drugs were never to be in her home again. After Wes ran out, she collapsed on the bed, wondering how things had got this bad. Two sons who were dealers. Tony, about to make her a 36-year-old grandmother.

Wes was frantic about how to get the money back. He had to pay back the people he had bought the drugs from. He knew he could get it from dealing some more. He also talked his girlfriend into making her home his new base of operations. She was described as being a few years older than him, at 17. Therefore, Wes was probably around 15 during this passage.

Moore was a teenager in this chapter, exploring the bad sides of the neighborhood he was in. He learned how to skip school and not get caught. His sister covered for him. He was starting to hang out with low-level drug runners. They offered him street cred, if not friendship.

He delved into hip-hop, able to recite whole songs by heart even while his schoolwork was faltering. He enjoyed the depth of it, and how it seemed to be speaking to him. Even the fantasy elements of it - about dealers and gang members, violence and sex - spoke to him. He would call this "romantic rebellion" (83), as he imagined what life was supposed to be like as a hard criminal.

While hanging out with a low-level drug runner named Shea, they decided to tag a building with graffiti. Moore had invented a name, Kid Kupid, which was supposed to represent his (largely nonexistent) experience with the opposite sex. He even had a design for the tag.

A police car pulled up just after they were done. The cops caught them easily, throwing them into the back seat in cuffs. Shea was defiant and smug. Moore had tears in his eyes. After the cops let them sweat a bit, one of them leaned back and looked at them in the back seat.

The officer told them: "You kids are way too young to be in this situation. But you know what, I see kids like you here every day. If you don't get smart, I am certain I will see you again. That's the sad part," (83).

After that, they let the boys go. Shea was still defiant, but Moore felt like he was given a second chance. However, he was back tagging walls soon after.





## Analysis

When Wes declared in jail that second chances do not matter if “the situation or the context” was still the same, he was talking about how the environment molds behavior. People act a certain way because they have been conditioned to do so.

He was also talking about how there needs to be more chances for urban youth if they are to succeed. In other words, there has to be more ways out of poverty than selling drugs. Where Wes grew up, there were not enough legitimate opportunities, but there were plenty of opportunities to sell drugs.

The author shows how the family looks after each other, but not necessarily in the way one would expect. For example, Moore’s sister covers for his skipping school. Tony tries to beat sense into Wes. In both cases, the sibling does the wrong thing because they think they are helping.

The author refers to a “complicated relationship” between black people and law enforcement. This is quite a gentle term, considering the history between these two groups. The author goes on to explain how the police had just as much to worry about as the families from the drug trade, which brought with it guns and petty crime.

These two chapters show a very different entryway into the world of drugs. Moore’s seems almost comically innocent compared to Wes’. Moore hung out with low level drug runners. Wes was in way deeper. The author placing these two chapters next to each other is almost a joke. There was no way that Wes and “Kid Cupid” were on the same level. However, he probably does so to show just how different their worlds were.

## Vocabulary

hypocrite, epiphany, inchoate, marginal, indelible, supine, twinned



## Section V: Chapter 5

### Summary

Chapter 5 is titled "Lost." It begins as Moore has begun his first day at Valley Forge Military Academy. He was not quite a teenager. Valley Forge was a school in rural Pennsylvania. Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf is an alumnus. A friend of Moore's mother had a relative who went there and became a successful businessman.

The events that precipitated his attendance there are then detailed. His mother got a call from the dean, about how he was put on probation for his slipping grades, skipping school, and a smoke bomb incident. While his mother was talking to the dean, Moore was instigating a fight with his sister. He slipped and accidentally split her lip. She sprouted crocodile tears to their mother. The mother, furious already with Moore after getting off the phone with the dean, slapped him. He did not know what to do, so he just stood there, angry and upset. She slapped him again. He gave no apology. They went to their own separate rooms and both cried.

He was sent to Valley Forge, and he did not adjust well. On his first morning, he refused to get up for the predawn wake-up call. He mouthed off to the sergeant, an older boy, who then returned with the rest of his commanding officers. They picked up his mattress and dumped him out of it on the floor. He attempted to run away four times in the first four days.

His sergeant, Austin, visited him on the fourth night. He told Moore that as much as Moore did not want to be there, the other officers did not want him there, either. So, he drew him a map with which to escape.

Moore fled that night at midnight. He followed the directions as best he could. However, he became lost in the woods. He imagined that he might die out there, eaten by wild animals. That was when he heard laughing. Austin and the other officers had followed him. They led him back to Valley Forge, and to the commanding officer.

Upon starting in military academy, no one was assigned a rank. They had to earn the rank of cadet. Before that, they were plebes. They had no rights, and no name. They were not allowed any contact with the outside world. Seeing that Moore was at a breaking point, the commanding officer, Colonel Batt, allowed him to make one phone call.

Moore woke his mother up in the middle of the night, pleading with her to take him home. He offered everything he could think of. His mother declined. She told him that he needed to give it a try. Too many people had sacrificed to get him where he was. He would later learn, she asked for money from all of her relatives to pay for military school. She told him: "I love you, and I am proud of you. And, Wes, it's time to stop running," (96).



When she had first visited the campus, she had been impressed with 19-year-old Cadet Captain Ty Hill, a young man who ran F Company, which had a reputation of the best of the best. She had asked him to keep an eye on her son. The day after the fake escape, Col. Batt sent Moore over to see him.

Wes' part of the chapter starts as he is attending Perry Hall High School in West Baltimore. Riding the bus to school one morning from the neighborhood of Dundee Village, he and his godbrother Red spied a few girls they had not noticed before. They made their moves, and Wes was successful in getting the phone number of one of them, Alicia.

Wes had good looks, charm, and disposable income. And he was using all of them to get girls, as many as possible. Within two months of meeting Alicia, she was pregnant with his child.

Wes went to Tony to tell him. He felt that he was crossing some point of no return and needed to talk to someone about it. Tony was still someone he looked up to, and was a young father as well. Tony thought it was hilarious. Their mother had just had another baby a year earlier, so there would be three very young kids in the family at the same time. Tony also thought it was funny to "accidentally" let Alicia's pregnancy slip during their mother's son's first birthday party. The author takes this time to explain that in Baltimore in 1991, almost 12 percent of girls between the ages of fifteen and nineteen had given birth.

Wes found himself with plenty of other girls. After one late-night dalliance with one of them, a boy was outside his house waiting for her to leave. This, Wes would learn, was a cousin watching out for her. He slammed Wes to the ground and beat in his face. Wes ran inside to get his gun. Ray, the cousin, had already started to leave but Wes ran after him. An ally in the drug business saw the trouble ensuing and came out with his own gun to help Wes. They chased Ray to his house, firing intermittently, hitting car windows and anything else in the way. One shot hit Ray and he fell before getting into his house.

Wes and his friend split up and both ran off. Wes came home, and ran past the girl, who was crying and yelling about calling the police. He ran inside, and his mother saw him with his face bloodied, holding a gun. He hid the gun, washed himself up, and waited for the police to come. He went as quietly as he could. His mother asked him if he was the one who shot Ray, or if it was the friend. He did not answer. As the police car was pulling away, he asked if they would stop so he could say something to his mother. They obliged, rolling the window down a crack. He told her "About your question. I don't know the answer" (107).

Mary, his mother, had called Tony when this had all started. Tony came in after the police had left. Mary, drained of emotion, told Tony "It's too late. Wes is already gone" (107).



## Analysis

The legacy of Valley Forge spoke to Moore's mother. Here is another case the author shows how a legacy is something that is sought. People want to be a part of something great, with history and reputation. They want the positive association that comes with a location.

The author is also showing how he is not really as tough as he says he is. The only person he mouthed off to was another boy, not the adults in authority. Also, when he got lost in the woods, he lost all hope, assuming he would be eaten by whatever wild animals were in rural Pennsylvania. He so-called toughness was a bit of a joke for the author.

Wes did not have a strong role model in fatherhood. He had only seen his father three times, and the man never seemed to recognize his son. Wes did not know what the role of a father should be. He knew that his mother was always there for him, so he assumed Alicia would always be there for his child. That did not mean that he would stick around, though.

Tony becomes a surrogate father to Wes, and he is not a very good choice. He was a violent drug dealer who was also fathering children he had no intention of parenting. Moore, meanwhile, had no shortage of role models. Every cadet ranked higher than him could teach him. Ty Hill had impressed his mother enough that she wanted him to keep an eye on her son. Additionally, there were plenty of faculty that could serve as role models.

In addition to role models, all of the soldiers, faculty, and cadets weaved together into a safety net. If Moore fell through the holes, there were plenty of people there who could catch him. They would all provide second chances for him. Wes' support took the form of a mother who often looked the other way, a half-brother who was a dealer, and his fellow dealers. These were kids who would pick up a gun and join him in shooting at someone without questions, but would not keep him out of trouble.

An earlier chapter showed Wes had no problem with escalating conflict. When he got into a fight over street football, the author includes that scene as foreshadowing. This came full circle later, as a conflict over a girl also caused him to go for a weapon. This time, however, it was a gun.

The author ends the chapter with the quote from his mother because it has two separate meanings. "Wes is already gone" (107), means that he has already been taken by the police, in the most literal sense. It also means that he is lost to her. He is lost into the world of violence and crime and fathering children he did not intend to be a part of.

The chapter was named "Lost" because both boys found themselves adrift in their new worlds. Wes was deep into the world of being a drug dealer. Moore, meanwhile, was quite literally lost in the woods. He had been given a last minute opportunity. His mother



had provided some tough love to give him one final chance to straighten out. If not, he might have shared the same fate as the other Wes Moore.

## Vocabulary

pubescent, fusillade, plebes, cachet, guidon, tellingly, holler (like to pick up women), pariah



## Section VI: Chapter 6

### Summary

Chapter 6 is titled Hunted. It takes place in 1994.

Wes returned to Dundee Village after six months of incarceration. He was lucky in that the bullet passed through Ray's shoulder, leaving a superficial injury. Ray was released from the hospital the next day. Also, he was tried as a juvenile because he was considered not to be a threat to the community.

Wes started at a new high school, living with his aunt Nicey. It did not last long. He dropped out after his child was born. He was a lieutenant in a drug empire. At its peak, his crew brought in \$4,000 a day.

The author explains the details of the drug company, from the look-outs as young as 7, to the hired muscle. He also states that Baltimore had a population of about 700,000 and an addict population of about 100,000. Still, Wes wanted more, because the people behind the scenes made most of it. "It started to become clear to Wes: the drug game was raw capitalism on overdrive with bullets, a pyramid scheme whose base was dead bodies and ruined lives" (112).

While hanging out with some of his crew, a guy walked up to him and asked to buy drugs. Wes turned him down. The guy threw up too many red flags. He was probably a cop. Eventually, though, Wes' greed got the better of him and he went over to the guy. He tried to make the sale in a cagey way, but he got arrested. Ten undercover cops surrounded him.

Meanwhile, Moore was moving up in the ranks of his world, too. He was now a sergeant in the military school. He had been there for three years, and was now in a command position. He had actually started to enjoy it. He improved in his classes, and credited the help of Cadet Captain Hill and the rest of the chain of command. As he put it, "They made it clear that they cared if I succeeded, and eventually so did I," (116).

The cost for Valley Forge lessened, as he started earning athletic and academic scholarships. College basketball recruiters had started to notice him. His uncle Howard told him to have a back-up plan, though, since not everyone gets into the NBA.

Still, life went on in his old neighborhood. He started feeling homesick for the good times, and sad about some of the bad news he was getting. Friends were getting arrested. His best friend's mother was gravely ill. He could not help but feel like he was outside his own life. "I felt like being in military school was keeping me in a bubble, ignorant of what was going on with my people on the outside," (118).

To illustrate this point, the chapter ends with Moore and his friend, a fellow sergeant, Dalio, walking to a local restaurant to get a stromboli. A car of young, white guys pulled



up and one of them claimed to be the colonel's son and he was going to report him. They did not know what to make of it and kept walking. Then, the car tried to run them off the road. They thought the car was going to run off be done with them. However, when they reached the restaurant, they heard someone shout "Go home, nigger!" (120). Moore turned and was hit in the mouth with a bottle or something hard. It chipped his tooth. He and Dalio ran back to the school. In a bit of odd coincidence, Moore was able to navigate their way back through the woods, because it was the same place he had been when he got lost in the woods in his first week on campus.

## Analysis

It is not a coincidence that the author referred to Wes as a "lieutenant" in the Baltimore drug trade. While a lieutenant has been used in crime situations before, such as the mafia's capos, this is an intentional comparison to the rank that Moore attained as a sergeant in military school.

Through documenting the few times that Wes had met his father, the author lays the groundwork for Wes' future parenting skills, or lack thereof. Therefore, when he is not a very attentive father, it is not much of a surprise for the reader. Indeed, his child's birth is not even mentioned in the book. The child (and the three more he eventually has) are not named by the author. This could be giving them privacy. It could be representing how little of a part of his life they are. It could be that showing how he has abandoned his children might turn the reader against Wes.

Again, Moore shows that he is not as tough as he would like to imagine himself to be. As a military school student, Moore is more than likely in better physical shape than some neighborhood hooligan. Military school students are also trained for eventual combat. However, when faced with real conflict, Moore ran. It was probably a smart move, though. He was outnumbered in a rural town where the youth thought nothing of hurling racial epithets and improvised weapons.

Wes' half of the chapter is actually less important than Moore's. This is unusual in that most chapters give Wes most of the action. It feels as if this chapter was important to Moore, with the racially motivated attack waking him up to what was going on in the real world. The portion of the chapter with Wes seems to just check in on him. He was not imprisoned long. His drug enterprise grew. Getting arrested again for a much more minor charge, dealing, was hardly worth mentioning in comparison to some of the other things going on in his life.

This is a pivotal chapter for Moore. It was a turning point for the teenager. He began to feel empowered and to think of the future. He made plans because he had hope. The author provides stark contrast with his namesake, Wes. It seems that Wes never thought about the future. Whether because of need or disinterest, he had to always keep focused on the present.

## Vocabulary

delineated, conspiratorially, pantomime





## Section VII: Chapter 7

### Summary

Part III is titled "Paths Taken and Expectations Fulfilled."

In the brief dialogue between the two Wes Moores, the one behind bars declared "I wasn't even there that day" (125). He was still stating he was innocent. The questions back down from specifics about his role in the crime to general beliefs. Moore asked Wes if people were a product of their environment. Wes replied that they are products of expectations. People will live up to others' expectations of them. "We will do what others expect of us. If they expect us to graduate, we will graduate. If they expect us to get a job, we will get a job. If they expect us to go to jail, then that's where we will end up too. At some point you lose control" (126).

Moore sympathized with Wes, but did not like how he seemed to take no responsibility for his predicament. There was another quote that followed this, but it is unclear which man said it: "True, but it's easy to lose control when you were never looking for it in the first place" (127).

Chapter 7 is titled "The Land That Time Forgot." It takes place in 1997.

Moore was forging his career in the military. He had developed a love of reading, and in particular a book by Colin Powell struck home for him. He was being recruited for college basketball, but he knew he was not as good as his competitors. Besides some people in his immediate family, most of the people he looked up to wore uniforms. He took some time to detail a few of the higher ranking officers in his school who made a mark on him, including one who announced he was leaving because he had an advanced stage of colon cancer. The impending death showed him that life is transient. The lesson from Colonel Billy Murphy was "When it is time for you to leave this school, leave your job, or even leave this earth, you make sure you have worked hard to make sure it mattered you were ever here," (133).

Moore thought that this impending death was a burden on a lot of the people he grew up with. They all knew life was fleeting, and had grown resigned to not mattering. There was no future.

Moore was learning how to jump out of an airplane to become a paratrooper. It was another step in becoming a commander. He was training at Fort Benning, which earned the nickname "the land that God forgot," because of how tough the training was there. With prayers on his mind, and his eyes closed, he took his first jump from the plane. His training and his equipment came through. As the parachute opened, his fear subsided and he looked out over the scenery.

In Wes' world, he was a father four times already. He and Alicia had children in 1992 and 1993. Then, with a woman named Cheryl, he had children in 1995 and 1996.



Cheryl had a heroin addiction, and it hurt him to see that. He did not respect the people he sold to, and he could not bear to realize it was happening in his own home. He had turned a blind eye to it for a while, but eventually saw the truth. He was tired of his lifestyle. “He understood that his thoughts contradicted his actions; he had long since accepted that. It was just that his tolerance of his own hypocrisy was wearing thin” (138).

He left his house after finding Cheryl high. He had a lot of walking and thinking to do. He found himself at his friend Levy’s house. Levy had left the dealing behind and was trying to go straight. Wes told him he was done, and wanted out as well. Levy warned that it was very hard giving up all that money, but it was for the best. He gave Wes the contact information for Job Corps, a program to help disadvantaged people find work.

On one hand, it would be nice to spend more time with his family, and not have to put his life on the line all the time. On the other hand, he was supporting four children, both mothers, and his own mother. He would not be able to get the money for that from Job Corps.

Still, he gave it a try. A bus picked him up and took him to the Woodland Job Corps Center in Laurel. It was spacious, manicured, with athletic fields and dormitories. He was promised that he could go home on weekends, call home when needed, and bring his music and work on his lyrics. He was assigned his room, and when he showed up, Levy was his roommate.

All applicants were tested to see where they were in their education. Wes tested high enough that he received his GED shortly thereafter. He was reading on a college level. He did go home every weekend, and he did not fall back into the drug trade. At Laurel, he became a leader. Other students came to him for help with their GED work and personal issues.

He took on carpentry as his job skill. For his project, he decided to build his 5-year-old daughter a house. “A house to protect her,” (143). At the end, it was 5 feet high, and about 3 feet wide. It had shutters, a door, and windows.

Wes graduated seven months later and went through a string of temporary jobs, none of them paying more than \$9 an hour. Eventually, the strain built up again. He bought some cocaine and went to work turning it into crack as a Jay-Z song played: “When the streets is watching, blocks keep clocking. Waiting for you to break, make your first mistake,” (145).

## Analysis

Most of the people Moore looked up to wore uniforms, while most of the people Wes tried to avoid wore uniforms. In the previous chapter, the two Wes Moores started to split. Their coincidences and comparisons were fewer. Their contrasts became sharper. In this chapter, they were coming into their own as young men. They shared little except for background at this point, and the author’s descriptions of their lives could not be any



more different. If the book had begun with this chapter, readers would have a hard time finding common ground between the two men. However, starting the characters in their youth, the author was able to build a timeline for each of them that brought the reader to this point naturally.

The parachuting out of the plane is a metaphor for the lack of control that the other Wes Moore was feeling. The metaphor could be extended to young, black men in urban areas. Moore, the soldier, had years of training bringing him to this spot in his life, and he had the equipment to land safely. Moore had less of a danger in parachuting out of an airplane than Wes did just engaging in his normal life. Moore had a parachute and a back-up chute, in case the first one did not work. He had a second chance. He had a cushion to brace him when he fell. His fears subsided as he looked out over the majestic view of the skyline. The author is saying that if you have your safety in place, you can take the time to enjoy the view from the top, even if it is a little dangerous.

It was no coincidence that the author placed this parachute chapter right after the dialogue in prison during which Wes attempted to absolve himself of the responsibility of his actions. Wes had said that at some point, people lose control after years of others expecting them to fail. In Moore's story, he was out of control, careening through the air, waiting for his parachute to open. The difference was that Moore had support and safety back-ups. He had a second change, third chance, and every other kind of chance.

The author mentions how Wes was feeling like a hypocrite. This is important because as Wes grew up, with Tony as a mentor, he did not listen to Tony's warnings to stay out of the game. Now, the voice telling him to stay out was his own, and he still could not listen.

There is only a quick mention of Wes' leadership potential at Job Corps. It is to show a correlation between Moore's leadership of cadets at military academy. It is a subtle reference, but it is clear nonetheless.

Since there is a list of available programs to help people at the end of the book, the reader can assume that the author is very interested in programs like Job Corps. He shows the program's benefits, but also shows its shortcomings in that while it prepares graduates for a job, there has to be a job worth taking on the outside.

Job Corps represents one of those second chances that Wes and Moore discussed early on in the book. It gave people like Wes and Levy another chance, an option to earn a clean living. However, there were no jobs available, so all it really did was raise false hope.

People in Job Corps were cut off from the rest of the world. The author showed how, while inside, Wes excelled and became a leader in the class. It was so far removed from the world he knew that drugs and crime could not touch him. It created a kind of distance from the dangerous world, a distance that has been a recurring theme throughout the book.

## Vocabulary

impermanence, aspirants



## Section VIII: Chapter 8

### Summary

Chapter 8, the final chapter, is titled “Surrounded.” It takes place in 2000.

Mary was watching the news on television. There was a story about two masked men who held up J. Browns Jewelers. These two ordered everyone to the ground while another two came in with mallets to smash the glass cases.

One of the people held at gunpoint was Sgt. Bruce Prothero, a 35-year-old police officer working a second job as a security guard to care for his five young kids.

The robbers made away with \$438,000 worth of items. They made it to two getaway cars they had bought at an auction the week before. Prothero followed them out, with his gun drawn. He managed to make it to one of the cars when one of the people inside fired three shots into his head and chest.

Since Prothero was an officer, the Baltimore police took this case very personally. There were 300 murders in Baltimore a year on average, but the death of a cop in one of the nicer suburbs outside the city was more newsworthy than all the other murders. One of the four suspects called a drug dealer to try to sell him the watches. The dealer had a wiretap on his phone, since police were closing in on him for his dealing, not in relation to this incident. They traced the call to that suspect, found one of the watches, and arrested him. He gave up the identities of the other three.

Back to Mary watching on television, and seeing a crime like that in the suburbs, she felt like no matter how much she ran, she could never escape it. The two men who were still at large were her sons. Thus began the police manhunt for them. They ransacked Mary’s home, followed up any lead they had on the men, and even pulled over a car that was part of a wedding procession for Wes’ cousin’s wedding.

The 12-day manhunt ended in North Philadelphia, at an uncle’s house. Officers tracked them down and two dozen of them surrounded the place and took them down without incident. News of the arrests reached Baltimore, and the establishment cheered as Mary wept.

Tony had been charged as the shooter but all four of them were sentenced to life without parole. The judge told Wes “You committed an act like something out of the Wild West, and you didn’t even realize how outrageous it was. That makes you a very dangerous person,” (157).

Wes’ portion of the book ends with a commentary by the author: “Maybe it was because he’d never thought long term about his life at all. Early losses condition you to believe that short-term plans are always smarter. Now Wes’s mind wandered to the long term for the first time. Finally, he could see his future,” (157). It was life imprisonment.



Meanwhile, Moore's final chapter opens up during an internship with Baltimore mayor Kurt Schmoke. A lot of things had changed since his childhood. The Murphy Homes, where the other Wes Moore used to frequent, were demolished and turned into mixed income housing.

Moore explained how he got to where he was. He had been put in touch with an admissions officer at Johns Hopkins University, who got him into the school – with a scholarship – despite test scores that were too low. This was an important lesson for Moore. It was who you knew. Specifically, it made him think of all the other young men from his neighborhood who never had a chance like this. Or, who had a chance but it got taken away from them, like a cut in funding for Pell grants. “For the rest of us – those who snuck in despite coming from the margins – the mission has to be to pull up others behind us,” (161).

Schmoke was an empowering influence on Moore. He pointed the young man toward learning history and culture and becoming a Rhodes scholar, like he himself was. In a semester abroad, Moore traveled to South Africa. The skyscrapers, beaches, and touristy areas were a surprise. The racial separation was not. Apartheid had ended six years earlier, but the races were still divided, mostly along economic lines. He saw a lot of similarity in what was going on in the cities where he grew up. He was staying with a host family, not far from a shantytown. This shantytown let him see what real poverty was. He had grown up in poor neighborhoods, but felt humbled by this. His host mother referred to him as colored, which was different than black. His skin tone was light enough that he would belong to a different caste, and receive more benefits than the blacks.

The time in South Africa had a profound effect on him, especially the concept of “ubuntu,” which meant “humanity.” “The common bond of humanity and decency that we share is stronger than any conflict, any adversity, and challenge. Fighting for your convictions is important. But finding peace is paramount. Knowing when to fight and when to seek peace is wisdom. Ubuntu was right. And so was my father. Watende, my middle name, all at once made perfect sense,” (168).

In his last days in South Africa, Moore learned about a ritual in which teenaged boys leave for a few months to become a man. The ritual was difficult and painful, involving surviving in the woods, and being circumcised without anesthesia. When they returned, they were admired and beloved by their family. The exact opposite was happening in America, Moore mused. He saw one young man after his return from the trial. “Your young men – along with our young women – are our strength and our future. Yet we fear them. This tall South African who now captured my attention wore his manhood as a sign of accomplishment, a badge of honor. His process was a journey taken with his peers, guided by his elders, and completed in a celebration.”

While talking to his mother on the phone, she shared an odd bit of news. She saw something on television about someone with the same name as him, from the same neighborhood, who was wanted for killing a police officer.



The book ends with an epilogue in which the lives of the characters are updated. Wes lived in Jessup prison every day, and nothing about that would ever change. The only significant change was that he was now a Muslim leader in the jail. Only the outside world changed. He became a grandfather in his 30s. Tony died young in prison of kidney failure. The mother of two of Wes' children lost custody and later died after a fall. Wes' mother, Mary, was raising six children, three of them Wes', and only one of them hers.

Moore, meanwhile, traveled to many countries, had many opportunities, and found happiness. He spoke at the Democrat national convention before Barack Obama accepted the nomination to run for president. He got married. He worked in Wall Street, fought in the military in Afghanistan, and was special assistant to Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice. Moore's grandfather died of cancer, but the rest of his family prospered.

## Analysis

The author explains the ritual where South African boys become men in order to show the contrast between the two cultures. He points out that "it takes a village" is not a tired maxim, but truth. These boys were growing up and becoming better people because everyone had faith in them and welcomed them into adulthood. As opposed to kids growing up in the ghetto in America, who had no one to welcome them and who were assumed to be thugs.

The closer that Moore got to adulthood, the harder it is for the author to delineate between the two lives. In the final chapter, he writes about the Murphy Homes and alludes to Pell grants. These two things meant nothing to Moore. However, they were important to Wes. The line between the lives starts to blur. This might be intentional and it might not be.

To argue that this is an intentional merging of the two stories is to understand the theme of distance that is explored throughout the book. Wes and Moore, despite their beginnings, traveled along very different vectors in their lives. They were never characters in each other's lives, except in the small interactions while Moore was visiting Wes in prison. Moore was given plenty of opportunities to create that distance from Wes. However, the author wants people to close that distance between those who are suffering and those who are succeeding. Indeed, in this chapter, Moore realized that it was his responsibility to help pull others up behind him. In his role in the mayor's office, he could see how decisions made at the top affect those down below. Therefore, the lines between the two lives thinned out.

Moore closed distance again by traveling to South Africa. There, he saw first hand how apartheid politics had defined life for generations. He saw a shantytown and understood what real poverty was. He was closer to it.





The author's version of the jewelry store robbery was strictly by the books. As opposed to other parts of the book, where he was privy to people's thoughts and feelings as they recalled them through modern-day interviews. Here, it is clear that his main sources were the official police reports. For example, the robbery is told in detached detail. Two men walk in, draw guns, order people to the ground. Two others come in later. They all leave. There are a few details that were not explained, such as a woman who had a cell phone in her hand at the time the robbers entered, but she put the phone away without them seeing. Perhaps the author learned this detail through court documents. The author does not get into the heads of any of the robbers, because he supposedly did not speak to any of them. Wes, in jail for the crime, continued to profess his innocence. If he was one of the robbers, he did not provide any details of the robbery for this book.

The author draws a lot of comparisons between himself and Wes. However, in every flashback, Wes was much more violent and successful in his criminal career. Even from the first chapters, Moore's forays into violence and crime were not nearly as violent or criminal as Wes'. The author works hard to draw correlations between the two, but there are many differences, even at a young age. To a degree, the author knows this. His attempts at being tough are laughable, and the reader can sense that the author is laughing at himself at times. So, by the final chapter, the fact that the two men are very different is not much of a surprise.

The author focuses quite a bit on nurture, but not so much on nature. This is in reference to the psychological theories on why people act the way they do: is it because of something innate, or is it learned? Was there something in Wes that predestined him toward a life of violence? This is something that could probably never be proven.

The eighth chapter is titled "Surrounded" for three reasons. First, Mary was surrounded by crime. Crime followed her no matter how hard she tried to flee. As the manhunt for Wes and Tony mounted, all of the family felt hounded by the police, by the stares from neighbors, and by accusations. Finally, Moore was surrounded by opportunities.

## Vocabulary

audacious, brusquely, gentrification, picturesque, genuflect, encomiums, apportioned





# Important People

## Wes Moore the author

Wes Moore, the author of this book, started out life in a bad neighborhood in Baltimore. He was drawn to trouble. He pushed the limits without breaking them too often. His most heinous crimes involved graffiti and smoke bombs. Still, his mother saw the path down which he was headed. To stop him, she sent him to military school. After a very rocky beginning, military school did what it was supposed to do which was to straighten out a kid who was at risk. It inspired him to continue service in the military for quite some time. He also ended up with several political jobs. Eventually, he got married and worked on Wall Street.

## Wes Moore the prisoner

The other Wes Moore had very similar beginnings in that he grew up on the streets of Baltimore. The differences were that his father was alive and useless to him, as opposed to dead. Everyone in his family was poor, uneducated, and had no chances for improving their lives. Indoctrinated into the drug trade while his age was still in the single digits, he rose up to become a dealer with his own crew. On their best days, they could bring in \$4,000 in one day. Nothing was ever enough for him, though. He kept working the streets, getting deeper and deeper. There were a few times when he had opportunities to get out, but they did not last. Nothing could compete with the easy money of dealing. Eventually, he was arrested for being part of an armed robbery of a jewelry store that left a police officer dead. Although he denied ever being involved in the crime, he was sentenced to life in prison.

## Tony

Wes' older brother Tony got into the drug business early, and he built a reputation for himself. However, Tony wanted to keep his little brother out of the game. They had a complicated relationship. Wes idolized Tony, but Tony wanted Wes to stay away from the same influences. Their relationship is summed up after Tony beat him up trying to keep him from dealing in Chapter 4: "Wes was so confused. He loved and respected his brother. Tony was the closest thing Wes had to a role model. But the more he tried to be like his brother, the more his brother rejected him. The more he copied him, the more Tony pushed back. Wes wanted to be just like Tony. Tony wanted Wes to be nothing like him" (72).

## Wes' Mom

Mary, Wes' mother, was one of eight children growing up in a row house in Baltimore. Life for her was always crowded with lots of people and children. She got pregnant with



her first child, Tony, when she was 16. Wes came a few years later. The men in her life, including her father, had alcohol problems and usually contributed little to the family emotionally or financially. Mary was always determined to get out of the ghettos in which she found herself. One option was college, before funding for that was pulled. Mostly, she moved her family around to try to escape the drugs and crime that the children always managed to find. She was never successful.

## **Moore's Mom**

Moore's mother was a news writer when she met Moore's father. Her family had come from Jamaica, where they had run a family farm for generations. Her own father had saved up money to come to America to study theology. She had trouble fitting in, but she eventually acclimated. She did not like a lot of what she saw in the inner cities, and she worked hard to get her family out of them. She did not want her children to be in crime and drugs. She gave Moore tough love, refusing to accept anything but the best from him. For example, when he was at Valley Forge, he begged to come home. However, she did not relent. If she had let him get out, then he might have fallen back to his old ways.

## **Cadet Captain Ty Hill**

Hill was Moore's surrogate big brother at Valley Forge. At 19, he had more years and more experience than Moore. He commanded respect and exuded authority. When Moore's mother had first visited Valley Forge, he stood out to her. She asked him to keep an eye on her son, and he did. Although he did not have a lot of screen time in the book, the reader is left with the impression that Hill was to Moore what Tony was to Wes. He was an older teenager, further along in the game, who had it all figured out. The difference was that Hill's world was a military academy and Tony's world was the drug trade.

## **Wes' father**

Wes' father was an alcoholic who only saw his son three times during the course of his life. Each time, he was under the influence and did not realize who he was. He was an important character in this book, not because of his presence but because of his absence. Wes modeled that absence by not being there for his own children years later.

## **Moore's father**

Moore's father was a journalist who ran a show. He was educated and socially conscious. Easy tempered and respectful. He died of a rare illness that was misdiagnosed by the hospital staff, possibly because he was a disheveled black man in the middle of the night. Although he did not live through his son's childhood, the feelings of having peace and calm in the household resonated with Moore as he grew up.



## **Mayor Kurt Schmoke**

Mayor Kurt Schmoke of Baltimore took Moore under his wing and helped influence him as a young man as to what his next step would be. He represented authority in Baltimore, someone who could change things. The fact that Moore was welcome in his office showed how far he had come from the streets.

## **Sgt. Prothero**

Sgt. Bruce Prothero, 35, was killed while working a second job as a security guard to support his five young kids. This was the incident that landed Wes in jail, although he claimed he was not there. Tony was indicted as the shooter.



# Objects/Places

## Jessup Correctional Institution

The two Wes Moores first talk at Jessup Correctional Institution. The meeting room reminds the author of a school cafeteria. Lucky family members are able to embrace, and then sit at a table together. The Moores are not lucky. They have to speak through telephones, with bulletproof glass between them.

## Baltimore

Baltimore was a huge city with many different neighborhoods. Though the book mentions tourist areas and upscale areas, the primary focus is on the poor areas. This was where Wes and Moore grew up. The few jobs that were there did not pay well. There were few opportunities to better oneself. The schools were not as good as those in other districts. The author provides a lot of statistics to explain what is going on in the city, such as the percentage of teenage girls getting pregnant and the estimated number of drug addicts. The statistics paint a picture of what young people are facing growing up in Baltimore.

## Riverdale

Moore's mother sent him to Riverdale, a private school to get Moore out of the ghetto. Though Riverdale offered a better education, it killed Moore's respect in the neighborhood, as other kids thought of it as a white school.

## Valley Forge

Valley Forge was the military academy that Moore was sent to when the private school was not enough. It was the next level of distance from the streets, in another state, and in a world of its own. It was prestigious and offered a legacy of top level graduates.

## Mary's House

Mary grew up in a row house in Baltimore filled with relatives. She was one of eight children. The family did not own the house. They could only afford to rent a home. The only reason they could afford this home was because the previous owner had been murdered by her husband. The house is not a main setting for the book's action, but it is an important setting. It shows where Mary got her start, which set the stage for Wes' life, as well.



## **Murder Homes**

Murder Homes is the nickname of the Murphy Homes, a project where Tony's father lived. The homes are low-cost housing for low-income residents. As in many cities, the projects became a center for the drugs and crimes in the area.

## **Job Corps**

The Woodland Job Corps Center was almost like going to college for Wes. The area was huge and well maintained, with wide lawns, athletic fields, and dormitories. Wes had a roommate who was a friend from the old neighborhood. Most importantly, the Woodland Job Corps kept Wes away from the old neighborhood.

## **South Africa**

South Africa was a physical representation of the racial divide in America and other countries. Apartheid was illegal, but it was still more or less a way of life. The races were divided geographically, economically, and socially. Moore was able to visit South Africa and understand race more thoroughly. Additionally, he was able to see real poverty up close.

## **Drugs**

The drug trade was the only thriving business in urban Baltimore. According to statistics shared by the author, the business was so prevalent that one in seven had a drug issue. Dealing drugs was the only way that Wes knew how to support himself and his growing family.

## **J. Browns Jewelers**

J. Browns Jewelers was the upscale jewelry store that Wes was accused of robbing. The fact that it was outside the ghetto made its robbery more scandalous and interesting in the news. A daring, fatal robbery in a nice area was more newsworthy than a similar robbery in a neighborhood where crime was expected.



# Themes

## Legacies, and Where You Are In Them

Both Wes Moores were part of a legacy, but they did not necessarily realize it at the time. A legacy is a history of influential people that came before them. It can be visualized as a series of steps in a ladder, and the Wes Moores were in the middle. The author seems to say that people are likely to continue the legacy that was left to them.

Moore's father was a reporter who hosted a show. He was well known in the field and well respected. Moore's mother's family were farmers and land owners in Jamaica. His grandfather saved up enough money to move to America to study theology. The author takes enough time on his own backstory to show that he came from hardworking, intelligent stock who cared about people around them and their future.

In contrast, the author paints a different picture of Wes' family. Wes hardly knew his father, seeing him sporadically and never under the best circumstances. While neither men had their fathers in the picture, Moore's was due to an early death, and Wes' was due to disinterest. His grandparents on his father's side loved him and welcomed him into their family. His grandmother on his mother's side died young, and his maternal grandfather was an alcoholic. His mother respected education and wanted one herself. She had started taking classes before her funding had been cut. Unfortunately, she had two sons with two men who had no intention of being father figures. The author shows this backstory to explain where Wes was coming from. The decisions he made were based on having the legacy of this family.

However, the author also shows that legacies mean different things to different people. Moore's street friends look down on him for attending a privileged private school that once housed JFK. Most people would look up at this legacy school. However, it had the opposite effect on the kids he grew up with.

Furthermore, both men created their own legacies. Although Moore did not write about having any children, it could be assumed that they would benefit from his stature in society and financial security. Wes, meanwhile, fathered four children out of wedlock. At the close of the book, three of them were being raised by his mother. The mother of two of the children had them taken away from her before she died. He was given life in prison. So, his children will not have him in their lives, much the same as he did not have his father in his life. That was the legacy he left his children.

## Choices Show A Better Way

While Moore was fortunate enough for his family to have choices, Wes did not benefit from those choices. Therefore, while the author shows that the path of Moore's life could be drawn with a lot of forks in the road, Wes' was a straight line.



Growing up, Moore chose to be a hoodlum. He did not take it as far as Wes, but he hung out with dealers and got in trouble a lot. It was his choice. There was another choice, to take the straight and narrow path, and be a good kid. He did not choose that. His choice was made for him when his mother put him in military school.

Even in adulthood, Moore's main problem was having too many choices. The author does not go so far as to show off his many options, but he does mention that he was being scouted by college basketball teams. The diploma from Valley Forge would have opened many doors. Working for the mayor of Baltimore, he was told to be a Rhodes scholar, when he did not have a clear destination. He could have gone in almost any direction and still been successful.

Wes, meanwhile, had a very clear destination from the very beginning. The author builds up the walls that guide Wes through his life. There is foreshadowing early on that shows Wes' penchant to react to violence by escalating it. There are also statistics peppered into the chapters about drop out rates, teen pregnancy, and the number of drug addicts per capita. These techniques were used to explain how Wes had fewer choices available to him.

There was one choice Wes did have, and the author takes the time to explore it. Wes went to Job Corps. However, when he got out, he found that he could not survive on the training it provided. So, it could be argued that he did not have much of a choice.

Choice can also mean how one feels about something. By explaining the psychology behind race riots, the author shows how easy it is to respond to unfairness with anger and depression. Young, black boys in the inner city only know how to lash out. The same is true for Wes. He did not learn any other way to deal with his emotions.

By the time the two Wes Moores meet, Wes is fairly resigned to the fact that he was in jail. He saw it as having no other choice.

## **Behavior Is Dictated By Surroundings**

The entire concept of this book involves trying to find out why Wes went to jail. In examining his life, the author looked into his surroundings. By detailing them, he presented his theory that it was his surroundings that molded him more than anything else.

The easiest part of one's surroundings to look at is their physical environment. In this case, there was little difference between the two boys growing up. The author makes it a point to show that they came from the same roots. However, Wes stayed on the street, while Moore went to better schools.

Moore's environment changed; in turn, it changed him. Eventually, the author even relates how he started to like the military academy. Wes, meanwhile, sought out bigger scores. He escalated his drug life, and the threats escalated. It kept getting worse.



Other people in one's surroundings are a primary influence. Everyone in Wes' life was on the same path. It was expected of him to lead down that path as well. The author notes that the soldiers at Valley Forge wanted him to succeed. However, said while he was jail that everyone expected him to fail.

Moore does not let himself off the hook, though. He is very hard on himself. For example, when he was in a private school and his grades were slipping, he writes that he had nothing but excuses. He does not accept that the situation around him was difficult and that was why he could not handle it. He makes himself the exception to his own rule that the surroundings are molding him.

## Distance Creates Safety

There are several instances where distance from the cruel realities of life created a safe zone where someone did not have to worry about issues as much. This was done by geography, psychology, and status.

The author makes a strong point that he came from the same neighborhood as Wes. However, when the reader really looks closely at this, they can see that the two men only had similar geographic starting points. The paths of their lives went different ways. For the most part, Moore was separated from the ghetto that influenced Wes' early years. Moore went to a private school, and then a military academy. He was insulated from the negative aspects of that neighborhood. In fact, the author includes the scene where he was hunted by the racists to show just how far he had come from the street. He did not even think about being attacked because of his race.

As Moore grew to adulthood, his status in life changed. He was no longer a kid looking for thrills and acting out against authority. He had become the authority, working in the mayor's office, and later being involved in federal politics. This distanced him even further from the life and death situations of the drug trade.

Wes' mother moves the family in order to get away from the crime in the neighborhood. She thought that if she could put some distance between her family and the influences of the street, that her boys would be safe. As it turned out, she was only moving from one bad neighborhood to another. In fact, the author shows that the one time Wes really excelled was at Job Corps, where he was living away from the old neighborhood, in a place where he did not have to worry about money.

The psychological distance she created was probably more detrimental. She told Tony that she believed Wes was making money as a DJ, and not as a dealer, because that was what Wes had told her. She believed him, possibly because she wanted to believe him. She had put some distance between herself and reality.

Wes did this as well. He never had any respect for the people who bought drugs from him. He put up a barrier between himself and them. When it turned out Cheryl was an addict, he could not handle that. He could not respect her. There had been signs that she was using, but he refused to believe them.





Financial security was the one thing both men yearned for. Moore was able to achieve it by working his way up through the military and political arenas. Wes was able to achieve it only by dealing. The tragedy of Job Corps, the author alludes, is that if Wes had been able to become financially secure through carpentry jobs, then he never would have gone back to dealing. He would have been able to distance himself from it.

## Second Chances

The concept of second chances shows up several times in the book, although it is not always spelled out. The idea behind it is that everyone gets multiple chances to succeed. However, people who start out life in a more comfortable lifestyle have more chances than others. Moore had more chances to succeed than Wes.

Throughout the book, Wes had opportunities to succeed. In some cases, he made poor decisions. For example, he got in a fight as a child and his first thought was to run home and get a weapon. He was very young then, and he was given another chance. His behavior did not change enough from one chance to another. The last one of real significance was Job Corps. This was a program that provided him with skill, confidence, and structure. The author shows him thriving in this situation. Then, the author shows how few opportunities there were outside of Job Corps to make a living that was as good as selling drugs.

In this case, the author seems to say, chances are not the same as opportunities. Wes might have had another chance with Job Corps, but immediately after that, there were no jobs to be had. There were no opportunities on which that second chance could thrive.

Sometimes, the second chance actually harms more than helps. For example, in the incident where Wes got a knife to fight the boy in a football dispute, he was arrested. Tony's father bailed him out and no one told his mother. If they had, perhaps she could have tried to get him help he needed. At the very least, she would not have lived in denial as long as she did.

The short dialogue before chapter four illustrates the theme of chances. When the two men were discussing things in the visiting room of the jail, they talk about having a chance at a better life. Both men had made mistakes, yet they were on opposite sides of the bulletproof glass. Moore lived with the comfort in knowing that there would always be more chances to succeed. His mother or someone would help him. There was always a parachute. Even if he did fall, he would not fall as far as others. Wes did not have that support structure. It was only a matter of time before his chances ran out. Unfortunately, young people always think they are invincible and never think that they are going to have a last chance. As Moore said to Wes, "I guess it's hard sometimes to distinguish between second chances and last chances," (67).



# Styles

## Structure

The book begins with an introduction that sums up the themes and story line. It then breaks the story into eight chapters. Each chapter is a snapshot of an important time in the lives of both of the subjects. It begins with a selection of conversation between the two men while one was in prison, so that readers never forget what was at stake. The book closes with many pages of “elevator organizations” that are working toward positive change.

There are two sections where the book shows photos of the two men and their friends and families. There would be one photo of Wes and Tony, shirtless, hanging out at a club in Baltimore. At around the same age, Moore is all smiles dressed as a cadet at Valley Forge. The author includes these to show the disparity between their two lives. One photo shows Wes shortly after he was charged with attempted murder. He looks like a child in the photo, he is so young. It really tells the story of how young he was when he started down the wrong path. The pictures of Wes are generally more blurry and beat up than the pictures of Moore. This shows how well they were kept.

The book closes with “A Call To Action” written by talk show host Tavis Smiley. In it, he urges people to seek help if needed and to contribute to good causes to help others.

Following the Call To Action is the Resource Guide. This encompasses more than 40 pages of organizations, what they do, whom they help, and how to contact them.

The book closes with acknowledgements from the author. It includes thanks to the people who became characters in the book, people in the publishing world, and even politicians who helped him like Dr. Ben Carson and Cory Booker.

## Perspective

The book is told from the point of view of the author, even when he is telling about the events that happened in Wes’ life. When he writes about his own life, he writes “I” and “me.” When he writes about Wes’ life, it is third person. But, it is not a detached third person. It is not omniscient, either. Most of his information comes from one-on-one interviews, so he is able to tell the story as if he is there. He is able to describe the characters’ thoughts because the reader is led to believe that the author has interviewed this person. However, the final chapter describes the attack that left Prothero dead. In this case, the perspective changes. It is a distant third person, without any knowledge of the characters’ thoughts or specifics about actions. This information, presumably, came from court documents. Therefore, the jewelry store robbery reads as if it is a re-enactment.

## Tone

The author has an even tone throughout the book, where he is more judgmental of the system rather than of the players within it. The author's intention is not to lay blame at the feet of any one man, although he is a little critical of Wes' inability to take responsibility for how he ended up. Rather, the book is critical of a system that allows generations of poor black people to stew in ghettos, robbing and killing each other to try to stay alive.



## Quotes

The chilling truth is that his story could have been mine. The tragedy is that my story could have been his.

-- Narration (Introduction paragraph 1)

**Importance:** This tagline for the book sums up the author's quest in writing it. He wanted to learn what set the two of them apart on different paths. They had so much in common that their lives could have been switched.

The distance I'd put between my brother's world and mine suddenly collapsed...  
Wherever he was, running for his life, he carried part of me with him."

-- John Edgar Wideman's *Brothers and Keepers*. (Introduction paragraph 1)

**Importance:** This quote from another book encapsulates one of the themes of the book: distance. The two Wes Moores had a distance between them. As the author learned more about his double, he could not help but feel for his struggle.

Soon it became clear that the Riots were about more than the tragic death of Dr. King. They were about anger and hurt so extreme that rational thought was thrown out the window – these were people so deranged by frustration that they were burning down their own neighborhood.

-- Narration (chapter 1 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** This quote is about more than just the riots. The riots represented rage that the young black men felt. The rage was so strong that it had become self destructive. The reader will eventually learn that Wes' decisions were self destructive.

I was becoming too "rich" for the kids from the neighborhood and too "poor" for the kids at school.

-- narration (chapter 3 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** This was after one of Moore's friends, Paris, asked "How y'all like it up at that white school?" (49). There was a significant difference between the two neighborhoods. Moore was trying to figure out where he fit in. The perception of the kids in the street was that the private school, mostly white, was bad, and the school they went to, mostly black, was good. However, most of the people in surrounding towns would probably say that the education received at the private school was better.

This game didn't require studying or exams. It didn't require a degree or vocational skills. All he needed was ambition. And guts. And, as Wes was soon to understand, an ability to live with constant fear.

-- Narration (chapter 3 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** Most of the people in Wes' world had few or no marketable skills. If they went to school, the school did not prepare them for the real world. However, the drug



trade did not require someone to be a good reader, have good work ethic, or be good with their hands. Anyone could do it if they wanted it enough.

I guess it's hard sometimes to distinguish between second chances and last chances.  
-- Moore (chapter 3 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** Moore and Wes were talking in prison about the nature of second chances. Wes declared right before this quote that second chances do not mean much if they do not change the situation. In other words, if a person is still in the same situation, they will likely act the same. Moore said this part about last chances because it is impossible to tell until the last chance actually happens when that last chance occurs. Someone will always think they have another chance.

You kids are way too young to be in this situation. But you know what, I see kids like you here every day. If you don't get smart, I am certain I will see you again. That's the sad part.

-- Unnamed officer (chapter 4 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** A police officer tried to talk some sense into Moore after picking him up for graffiti. It was a minor crime, so he was trying to express to the youth that if he continued down this path, there would be repercussions. The officer was giving Moore a second chance.

I love you, and I am proud of you. And, Wes, it's time to stop running.

-- Moore's mother (chapter 5 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** Moore's mother gave him some tough love when he was sent to military school. He wanted to get out so badly, but his mother refused to give in to his pleading. This single act probably made the biggest impact on him. Also, the phrase "it's time to stop running" was included by the author because of its dual meaning. Moore was literally trying to run away from the camp, and he was also running away from his responsibility to grow up and be a good person.

It's too late. Wes is already gone.

-- Mary (chapter 5 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** Mary said this after the police took Wes away for shooting at the cousin of the girl with whom he was sleeping. She had called Tony for help, and Tony came over as quickly as he could. By the time he arrived, the police had already taken him away. That is the literal explanation of this quote. However, the author uses "already gone" to mean that Wes was lost to her. Wes was in the world of violence and drugs.

They made it clear that they cared if I succeeded, and eventually so did I.

-- Narration (chapter 6 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** The author writes this while talking about his time at Valley Forge. The superior officers nurtured and inspired him, even if they did not make it easy for him.



They genuinely wanted to see him excel. Although his mother did as well, this was the first time that he was in an entire environment that was structured for an individual's success.

I felt like being in military school was keeping me in a bubble, ignorant of what was going on with my people on the outside.”

-- Narration (chapter 6 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** Moore was feeling distant from his old neighborhood, cut off from the good and also the bad. He was hearing about things in his neighborhood third person from a phone call or letter, instead of living them. The fact that he refers to his old world as “on the outside” is telling because it shows he knew how out of the loop he was.

We will do what others expect of us. If they expect us to graduate, we will graduate. If they expect us to get a job, we will get a job. If they expect us to go to jail, then that's where we will end up too. At some point you lose control.

-- Wes (chapter 7 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** Wes is talking to Moore while in jail. He says that people internalize others' perceptions of them. If most of the voices they hear are negative and lack any hope for the future, that becomes reality for the listener. It implies that people are a product of their surroundings.



# Topics for Discussion

## The murder of Sgt. Prothero

The true events of the murder of Sgt. Prothero are described briefly in the beginning of the book. Additionally, the reader knows that Wes is in prison for the events of that day. Why, then, did the author start there rather than build up to that event?

## Role of Sports

Describe how sports played different roles into the lives of both men growing up.

## Structure

Every chapter takes place primarily during the events of a single year. Did the author give enough information through these eight chapters to build a convincing life history for each of the two main characters? Was more needed? Were any events able to be cut and still have the same story?

## Parenting Styles

Wes and Moore shared the same gender, ethnicity, and neighborhood. The author skips one other they have in common: their mothers were both very involved in their lives. In what ways were their mothers the same in how they raised their boys? In what ways did their parenting styles differ?

## Setting

Why does the author only place a small amount of the action in the jail? The book could have been an in-depth interview between the two men. Instead, there is only a few pages of these two men sharing space together. Why did the author make that decision?

## Intended Audience for Book

Who is the intended audience for the book? Is it young, black males at risk of going down the wrong path? Is it people who are outside the struggle of the inner city, so they can help those in need? Is it policy makers and legislators who can affect legal change?



## **Sgt. Prothero Character Analysis**

Sgt. Prothero, the victim in the story, is not fleshed out as a character. Why does the author limit Prothero's role in the book as just a murder victim?

## **Relationship Between Wes and Tony**

Consider the relationship between Wes and his half-brother, Tony. How do the two feel about each other? What makes their relationship so close and yet so complicated? What does Tony want for Wes? What does Wes want from Tony?

## **Inner City Youth**

The author does not preach that specific changes need to be made to prevent more young men turning out like Wes. However, he does make some subtle suggestions about policies and programs that could change to better prepare young urban men for a safe adulthood. What are some of the suggestions that the author makes that would benefit inner city youth?

## **Wes' Innocence**

Does the author think Wes is innocent? What evidence does he give to support that conclusion?