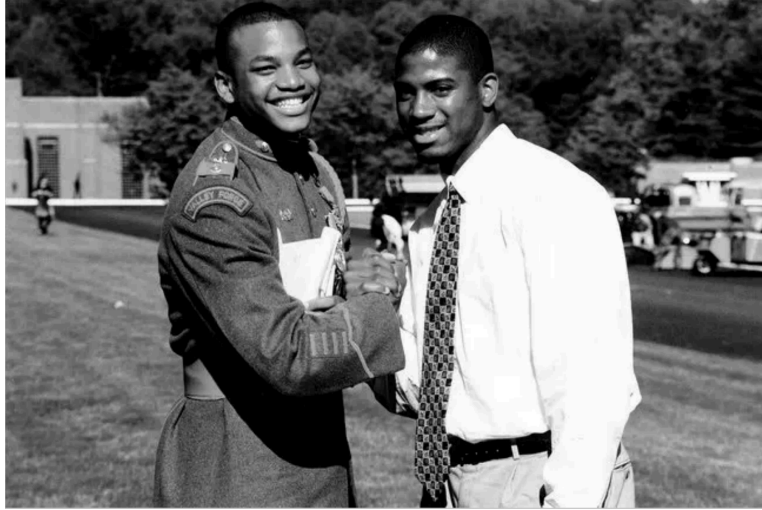


Two Men and Two Paths

By: Nicholas Kristof

Adapted by Fishtank Staff

- 1 When Wes Moore won a Rhodes scholarship in 2000, The Baltimore Sun published an article about his triumph. He was the first student at Johns Hopkins to win a Rhodes in 13 years, and the first black student there ever to win the award.
- 2 At about the same time, The Sun published articles about another young African American man, also named Wes Moore. This one was facing charges of first-degree murder for the killing of an off-duty police officer named Bruce Prothero, a father of five.
- 3 Both Wes Moores had troubled youths in blighted neighborhoods, difficulties in school, clashes with authority and unpleasant encounters with police handcuffs. But one ended up graduating Phi Beta Kappa and serving as a White House fellow, and today is a banker with many volunteer activities. The other is serving a life prison sentence without the possibility of parole.
- 4 "One of us is free and has experienced things that he never even knew to dream about as a kid," the successful Wes Moore writes in a new book, "The Other Wes Moore." "The other will spend every day until his death behind bars . . . The chilling truth is that his story could have been mine. The tragedy is that my story could have been his."
- 5 For me, the book is a reminder of two basic truths about poverty and race in America.
- 6 The first is that American antipoverty efforts have been disgracefully inadequate. It should be a scandal that California spends \$216,000 on each child in the juvenile justice system, and only \$8,000 on each child in the Oakland public schools.
- 7 Far too many Americans are caught in a whirlpool of poverty, broken families, failed schools and self-destructive behavior that is replicated generation after generation. The imprisoned Wes Moore became a grandfather last year at 33.
- 8 The writer Wes Moore offers clues from his own experience about how boys get sucked into that whirlpool.



Moore, Wes. Photo 'Wes Moore, at his 1996 graduation with his friend, Justin Brandon.' The New York Times, 2010.

- 9 His father, a radio and television journalist, died of a virus after a hospital emergency room—seeing only a disoriented, disheveled black man—misdiagnosed him and sent him home to get "more sleep," Mr. Moore writes. The writer Wes grew up in a poor, drug-ravaged neighborhood of the Bronx.
- 10 His mother worked multiple jobs and scrounged to send him to Riverdale Country School, an elite prep school, but Wes felt out of place among wealthy, white students—and his black friends at home teased him for going to "that white school." Wes skipped classes, let his grades slip, hung out with a friend who was dealing drugs, and collided with the police.
- 11 Despairing, Wes's mother dispatched him to a military school. There he finally began to soar.
- 12 In the case of the other Wes, there were some moments when he almost escaped. His mother was earning a college degree at Johns Hopkins—which probably would have provided the family a ladder to the middle class—when Reagan-era budget cuts terminated her financial aid and forced her to drop out.
- 13 Then the criminal Wes almost found his footing with the Job Corps. There he earned his G.E.D., testing near the top of his class, and began reading at a college level. He learned carpentry skills—but afterward never found a good job and tumbled back into his old life.
- 14 The second basic truth underscored by this story is that kids can escape the whirlpool—but they need help.

- 15 The author Wes Moore escaped partly because of family support and partly because he was helped by mentors at his military school. Not surprisingly, Mr. Moore believes passionately in mentoring, partly because so many boys in poor families have no father at home and lack male role models. He mentors boys and girls in Baltimore and New York and is directing some of the profits from his book to two organizations that provide mentoring.
- 16 One is City Year, which supports young people taking a year of public service to work in impoverished neighborhoods. Another is the U.S. Dream Academy, which supports children whose parents are in prison (and who are consequently at great risk themselves of tumbling into trouble).
- 17 There are no quick fixes to solve poverty. But carefully conducted experiments show that some strategies work: intensive early childhood education modeled after the Abecedarian Project, rigorous schools like those in the KIPP network, volunteer reader tutoring like that done by Start Making a Reader Today, and subsidized jobs programs like Canada's Self-Sufficiency Project that build the employment habit. These approaches have a much better record than juvenile detention and are far cheaper.
- 18 Mr. Moore ends his book with a call to action, arguing that each of us can play a role through volunteer work or donations. His own trajectory underscores that lives are at stake, and they can be turned around.