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First Year Reading Assignment

*The Other Wes Moore* displays qualities of personal responsibility, self-sufficiency, and citizen leadership throughout the book. Even though both Wes Moores had different perspectives of these qualities, they were represented nonetheless in each of their stories.

Wes Moore constantly emphasizes the difference in paths between him and the “other” Wes. Although he reflects on how his and the “other” Wes’ fates were “determined by a single stumble down the wrong path, or a tentative step down the right one,” (Moore, xiv) there is the underlying presence of personal responsibility in how their stories progressed. Wes originally rebelled against his mother’s decision to send him to military school. However, through his own eventual decision to pursue his education, he was able to create successful outcomes. The “other” Wes unfortunately did not meet the same fortunate outcomes from his actions. Despite trying to exit the drug industry and providing for his family in more lawful ways, it was ultimately Wes’ own decision to return to drugs and eventually rob the jewelry store.

 Both Wes Moores exhibited self-sufficiency throughout their stories. The author was granted the opportunity to study in South Africa, in which he learned traditions and values kept by South African culture. This opportunity calls for independence, as he travelled far from his life and family in America. The “other” Wes had to become self-sufficient in his youth due to the economic hardships his family and community were facing. In order to afford certain luxuries like expensive shoes and clothes, he turned to the drug game to pick up extra money. Despite his unlawful methods, Wes had a sense of self-sufficiency in his adolescence.

The author obviously displays the qualities of a citizen leader. Wes was first introduced to the value of leadership in his military training: “It was a different psychological environment, where my normal expectations were inverted, where leadership was honored and class clowns were ostracized." (Moore 96) Now, as a decorated veteran, acclaimed author, and social entrepreneur, Wes Moore is an inspiration to many. This is where the divide between both Wes’ stories is evident. Even though the “other” Wes demonstrated potential to be a leader in his family and community by leaving the drug game, the inability to financially provide for his family steered him back to the immoral path he was already taking as a youth.

This book connects to a college student because it emphasizes the need for education in all communities. Through the Moton museum and Wes Moore’s book alike, a Longwood student knows that teachers are the foundational support for the younger generations’ ideals and ambitions. Through the unfortunate circumstance of the “other” Wes dropping out of school, he had to support himself and his family through drugs. He made the decision to take part in the robbery of a jewelry store and the eventual homicide of Officer Bruce Prothero. While the actions Wes took may not have been entirely due to his lack of education, the author writes, “…’it’s hard sometimes to distinguish between second chances and last chances.’” (Moore, 67)

This book is an excellent assignment for those entering college to reflect on their own lives and their educational path. Students also can determine the values that colleges, particularly Longwood, encourage in their student population. I was given the chance to talk to Wes Moore about how much the book meant to me and my prospective career in education, and I felt accomplished in receiving praise from such a highly esteemed man. I hope that in my future at Longwood and my career as a secondary educator, I am able to reflect these qualities onto myself and others.