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## The Work: My Search for a Life That Matters

Wes Moore

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NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER



Author of **THE OTHER WES MOORE**

# Wes Moore


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## THE WORK

SEARCHING  
FOR  
A LIFE THAT  
MATTERS

"Wes Moore's gripping personal story, set against the dramatic events of the past decade, goes straight to the heart of an ancient question that is as relevant as ever: not just how to live a good life, but how to make that life matter. Above all, this book is about how to make our journeys not just about surviving and succeeding, but about coming truly alive."

—ARIANNA HUFFINGTON

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**Wes Moore : The Work: My Search for a Life That Matters** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Work: My Search for a Life That Matters:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. What a great inspirational bookBy CustomerWhat a great inspirational book! We ordered this as a required text book for my daughter, a college freshman. When it arrived I flipped through it and read a few pages, then found myself reading the whole book that afternoon. His message is perfect for everyone, but a brilliantly ant message for new college students. What smart professors making this one required reading! My daughter was thrilled to also gave the opportunity to meet Mr. Moore at a special workshop and

also hear him speak at the Convocation at Montana State University. I believe he is blessing so many young people with his inspirational message of hope, and finding one's true calling. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Refreshing outlook! By JSawyerHardcover (edit) review Thanks Netgalley for a free book to read and review. One man's journey through life and the wisdom that comes with. I think many things shape our life and mold us, these are the author's thoughts and life lessons. Heart felt book, and amazing read. Making our life have a purpose is a luxury some of us don't have. Everyday we go to work unfulfilled, but the author has a simple message. Our life is defined by what we make of it. Overall entertainment is five stars. I really enjoyed this look into his life, and the view of his time in Afghanistan. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. A Life That Matters By DitzzyRedhead I am a huge fan, and I find this book to be a nice update of the story I read several years ago. It provides depth to the man I've seen on MSNBC, OWN, PBS and lots of places in between. I like the counter point of other stories to balance his POV. All of the people in this book could succeed on the simplest of terms, but they chose 'the road less traveled', as Robert Frost put it, and it has 'made all the difference.' Moore practices what he preaches -- he's smart, he's connected, he believes in mentorship and is living a life that matters.

The acclaimed author of *The Other Wes Moore* continues his inspirational quest for a meaningful life and shares the powerful lessons about self-discovery, service, and risk-taking that led him to a new definition of success for our times. *The Work* is the story of how one young man traced a path through the world to find his life's purpose. Wes Moore graduated from a difficult childhood in the Bronx and Baltimore to an adult life that would find him at some of the most critical moments in our recent history: as a combat officer in Afghanistan; a White House fellow in a time of wars abroad and disasters at home; and a Wall Street banker during the financial crisis. In this insightful book, Moore shares the lessons he learned from people he met along the way—from the brave Afghan translator who taught him to find his fight, to the resilient young students in Katrina-ravaged Mississippi who showed him the true meaning of grit, to his late grandfather, who taught him to find grace in service. Moore also tells the stories of other twenty-first-century change-makers who've inspired him in his search, from Daniel Lubetzky, the founder of KIND, to Esther Benjamin, a Sri Lankan immigrant who rose to help lead the Peace Corps. What their lives—and his own misadventures and moments of illumination—reveal is that our truest work happens when we serve others, at the intersection between our gifts and our broken world. That's where we find the work that lasts. An intimate narrative about finding meaning in a volatile age, *The Work* will inspire readers to see how we can each find our own path to purpose and help create a better world. Praise for *The Work* "Powerful and moving . . . Wes Moore's story and the stories of those who have inspired him, from family members to entrepreneurs, provide a model for how we can each weave together valuable lessons from all different types of people to forge an individual path to triumph. I've known and deeply admired Wes for a long time. Reading *The Work*, I better understand why." —Chelsea Clinton "Wes Moore proves once again that he is one of the most effective storytellers and leaders of his generation. His gripping personal story, set against the dramatic events of the past decade, goes straight to the heart of an ancient question that is as relevant as ever: not just how to live a good life, but how to make that life matter. Above all, this book teaches us how to make our journey about more than mere surviving or even succeeding; it teaches us how to truly come alive." —Arianna Huffington, author of *Thrive* "How we define success for ourselves is one of life's essential questions. Wes Moore shows us the way—by sharing his incredible journey and the inspiring stories of others who make the world a better place through the choices they've made about how they want to live. We come away from this important book with a new understanding of what it truly means to succeed in life." —Suze Orman "An intriguing follow-up to his bestselling *The Other Wes Moore* . . . Moore makes a convincing case that work has the most value if it's built on a foundation of service, selflessness, courage, and risk-taking." —Publishers Weekly "A beautifully philosophical look at the expectation that work should bring meaning to our lives." —Booklist "The *Work* will resonate with people seeking their own purpose." —BookPage From the Hardcover edition.

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important book with a new understanding of what it truly means to succeed in life.”—Suze Orman

“Wes Moore puts a mirror up to himself and shares the reflection with stunning candor. A truly moving picture of personal growth, and one that will make you consider your own path, struggles, and successes in a new way, *The Work* is a must-read.”—General Stanley McChrystal, former commander of U.S. and international forces in Afghanistan

“As a Rhodes scholar who fought in Afghanistan and later became a social entrepreneur, Wes Moore is a shining light of his generation—and one who captivates audiences. But he’s also humble, inquisitive, and constantly searching, which makes his story accessible, relevant, and illuminating to all of us. *The Work* will inspire everyone who seeks greater meaning and impact in their life.”—Charles Best, founder, DonorsChoose.org

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About the Author Wes Moore is a social entrepreneur and a combat veteran of Afghanistan. His first book, *The Other Wes Moore*, was a *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* bestseller. He lives in his hometown of Baltimore with his wife and two children.

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*The Lesson of the Student*

Come to Learn, Leave to Lead

“Flight attendants, please be seated and prepare for landing.” I sat back in my chair and started flipping through the *British Airways* magazine in my lap, hoping it would help pass the time before we touched down. As my eyes darted from one glossy picture to the next, I noticed that the young woman sitting to my right was gripping the armrest between us with a desperate ferocity, as if our safe landing were dependent on her hanging on to the support. She stared straight ahead, not blinking, not flinching. At one point she flicked her eyes in my direction and I gave her what I hoped was a reassuring smile, wanting to soothe her but not come off as weird. After a moment her face softened and she returned the smile. As if a trance had broken, her shoulders relaxed and the death grip she had on the armrest eased. She looked at me and said in an English accent, “I guess everything has changed.”

I arrived at London’s Heathrow Airport on September 23, 2001, on one of the first transatlantic flights granted airspace after the attacks of September 11, 2001. What should have been an unexceptional flight was filled with passengers afraid to sleep, instead sitting rigid and vigilant for the six-hour journey, like soldiers standing their post. I was right there with them, fighting off the idea that kept reappearing somewhere in my mind that this flight might be my last. I had just turned twenty-three. The passengers applauded the crew as the plane touched down on the runway at Heathrow, a ritual likely shared on aircrafts around the world that day, and we all collectively breathed a sigh of relief. This at first seemed odd to me, the idea of applauding someone for successfully accomplishing their job. Nobody applauds the garbage collector as they patrol a neighborhood collecting overstuffed bags filled with the week’s trash. Nobody applauds the taxi driver as they pull to a stop and yank the receipt from the meter. But the repeated images emblazoned into our minds, planes that took off but never landed, reminded us of the miracle of landing. The hundreds of people onboard, including me, sat patiently and waited for the seat belt light to be turned off, and then gratefully filed off the plane. Everyone was unusually polite and deferential—very different from the usual mosh pit that forms in the aisle when it’s time to disembark. While I would later learn that in other countries, applause for a safe landing is a kind of ritual, that day at Heathrow the clapping was something different. I smiled again at my new British friend seated next to me as we headed together toward baggage claim. Her smile back was one of relief.

Along with thirty other passengers on that plane, I was headed to Oxford University, one of the oldest and most prestigious institutions of higher learning in the world, but my mind swirled with grief for the lives taken too soon. Less than two weeks earlier, September 11, 2001, had been my little sister’s twenty-first birthday. I was scheduled to have a meeting that day at Morgan Stanley, whose offices were in one of the towers, but I’d moved it to September 13 because my mother and I decided to surprise my sister for her birthday. Mom and I were in the car, driving up from Baltimore to New Jersey, where my sister lived, when we began to get the news. By the time the second tower fell, we knew we would never make it to New Jersey. Once we were able to confirm that my sister was safely at home, we turned around and drove home.

I’d done work, through the military, on the rise and ramifications of radical Islamism before September 11. I’d done research on South America’s tri-border region, the lawless area between Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay where Islamist terrorists were suspected to train, and I had closely followed the events around the suicide bombing of the *USS Cole* that killed seventeen American servicemen. I wasn’t one of these people that had never heard of the group Al-Qaeda before. Still, I had no idea this was coming or what it was when it first went down. I was a reserve officer, not exactly privy to the National Security Council’s daily briefing. But my years of military training told me this much: I knew that when the first reports came in from Washington saying “we are going to respond,” that could only mean one thing: we were going to war. When our plane landed in London on September 23, all of the passengers sat patiently and waited for the seat belt light to be turned off, then gratefully filed off the plane. Everyone was unusually polite and deferential—very different from the usual center-aisle mosh pit that forms when it’s time to disembark. Our countries would soon be at war, but in the moments after the towers fell, there was this: small pockets of unprecedented peace. This was the context in which I opened the next stage of my life. Part

of me wondered if I was making the right choice. I was leaving behind my family and friends, including my mother. I was leaving behind my home country, which was still reeling from a terrorist attack, while starting a new life far away from the people whom I loved the most and who depended on me. I had an unbelievable opportunity in England, but I never felt more American than the moment I left it. My American Journey was, not coincidentally, the name of one of the most influential books I've ever read. When I was a teenager attending military school, few books offered me the opportunity to see myself--and my potential--the way Colin Powell's autobiography did. The book was published in the aftermath of the first war in Iraq, but before his beleaguered term as secretary of state, when he helped usher in the second Iraq War. When I read the book, my sense of politics was hazy at best, but what drew me to it were the stunning similarities between our early journeys. Like me, Powell hailed from Jamaican roots. He was born in New York and I was born in Maryland, but we were both raised in the Bronx. We were both shaped by our military experience. My short time around the military--as a cadet in military school--had changed me. It gave me more discipline and direction, but more than that, it provided me with a kind of brotherhood that I had never imagined would be possible. I suspected the same was true for Powell, who had reached the highest rank the Army had to offer: a four-star general and chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. One big difference between us--aside from the fact that Powell was among the most famous people in the world and I was an anonymous teenager--was that Powell was a father, whereas I was a son. In his book, Powell tells of a letter he wrote each of his children when they turned sixteen. My own father was not alive and could not write me such a letter, so I took Powell's advice as if it had come from my own dad: You now begin to leave childhood behind and start on the road to manhood. You will establish definitively the type person you will be the remaining fifty years of your lifetime. You know what is right and wrong and I have confidence in your judgment. Don't be afraid of failure. Be more afraid of not trying. Take chances and risks--not foolhardy actions, but actions which could result in failure, yet promise success and reward. And always remember that no matter how bad something may seem, it will not be that bad tomorrow. Don't be afraid of failure. Take chances and risks. Have confidence in your judgment. I thought of those words on the morning of September 23, 2001. To me the lesson in those words was that life will throw opportunities of all kinds at you--but it's up to you to use your judgment and take the risks of seizing the opportunities that make the most sense. The risk is that you might fail, but, as General Powell said, "no matter how bad something may seem, it won't be that bad tomorrow." Just before I left for graduate school in England, I attended something the Rhodes Trust called "Bon Voyage Weekend," a chance for the newly selected Rhodes Scholars to meet their fellow scholars and learn more about the opportunities ahead; a time to celebrate, but also to find out the price of the ticket. As for the literal price, we were told that the bills for the two- or three-year adventure in Oxford, England, would be taken care of. Flights to and from the United States, covered. Travel expenses to see the world--as long as it had to do with our research--were expensed. Adults who were already changing the world rushed over to congratulate us for hardly doing much more than having good grades and potential. We were in our early twenties, most of us barely old enough to drink legally and still not old enough to handle our liquor, as we go on to prove nightly once we got to Oxford. We listened intently as Admiral Stansfield Turner, former director of the CIA, and Joseph Nye, former chairman of the National Intelligence Council and father of the international relations theory of neoliberalism, spoke on how the Rhodes Scholarship helped to prepare them for careers spent shaping national security in our nation for a generation. We laughed as former senator (and NBA star) Bill Bradley shared comical stories about trying to fit his six-foot-seven-inch frame through Oxford's ancient doorways, built in a shorter age. We all rushed to take pictures with Bill Clinton, the former Rhodes Scholar who had just left the Oval Office after completing his twenty-four-year career in elected office. But of course 9/11 had happened just two weeks earlier, and even amid the celebrations and camaraderie, the events of that day hung over everything. We were being inducted into a prestigious fellowship, but there was also a sense in which we were being enlisted into an urgent though undefined battle. This was underlined one night when we all sat quietly as we shared a meal with Solicitor General Ted Olson, a man who was still deep in mourning and who painfully recounted the story of the last phone conversation he had had with his wife, Barbara Olson, on board American Airlines Flight 77 en route to Los Angeles, a plane that had been flown instead into the Pentagon on 9/11. Once she realized the plane was being hijacked, she called her husband, unaware of the other two planes that had already flown into the World Trade Center in NYC. She called him to tell him the plane had just been commandeered; she wondered what she should do. Then the line went dead. The fact that Olson came to speak to us while still mourning the sudden death of his wife was a testament to how important he thought it was to send us off with a strong sense of duty to our country's new, undefined mission. It was already clear, just from that weekend, that the Rhodes Trust was giving me access to a world that was pretty unrecognizable compared to anything I'd seen before. I felt overwhelmed and undeserving, the arbitrary recipient of a golden ticket to a secret world, a school so old it has no official founding date (records indicate that teaching at Oxford existed as early as 1096). When I told my friends back home about the fancy hotels and dinners and the VIPs who lined the walls of every room we entered, they listened and smiled with pride but weren't sure exactly what to say. I was disoriented and hoping that someone could help me make sense of it. And the most remarkable thing about this was that there was no catch. No hidden cameras recording it all as a social experiment, no small writing at the bottom of the contract, no unwritten

rules we all would learn about the hard way. This was a world where they made only two requests of you. The first was clear and concise: to learn. This learning wasn't the same as the grade-grubbing that had defined so much of our academic lives to that point. In fact, for many of the classes I would take over there, pass/fail was standard. The mandate to learn simply meant to come back a different person than the person you were when you arrived. More deeply informed, more cultured, more prepared. The second request was a bit more enigmatic. The scholarships were established in 1903 and outlined four criteria to be used in the selection of the scholars:

- Literary and scholastic attainments.
- Energy to use one's talents to the full.
- Truth, courage, devotion to duty, sympathy for and protection of the weak, kindness, unselfishness, and fellowship.
- Moral force of character and instincts to lead, and to take an interest in one's fellow beings.

In his will, Cecil Rhodes stated distinctly that he wanted the scholars "to fight the world's fight." None of us were sure exactly what that meant. When a mentor of mine, Baltimore mayor Kurt Schmoke, first encouraged me to apply for the Rhodes Scholarship, he made it clear that he wanted me to know who Cecil Rhodes was before applying to accept his money. Mayor Schmoke, a brilliant and often radical black man--he famously pushed for decriminalization of drugs at the height of the drug-fueled epidemic of violence in Baltimore--walked me through the life and crimes of Rhodes. I hadn't known anything about Rhodes before that conversation, but since then I have never forgotten who he was. Cecil Rhodes was born in 1853 in England, and made his name and fortune in southern Africa as one of the founders of the diamond mining company DeBeers. He died young, as one of the richest men in the world. He left a legacy of bold entrepreneurialism and aggressive wealth accumulation, but of course he's remembered for more than that. Cecil Rhodes was also a brutal and violent racist whose extreme tactics to control black labor and undermine black sovereignty went hand in hand with his unabashed belief in Anglo-Saxon supremacy. Southern Africa, with its wealth and its vicious racism, was then in many ways a mirror of Rhodes. I had had a bit of personal experience with South Africa. As an undergraduate, I studied abroad in the townships outside of Johannesburg, where I got to see firsthand how black people still struggled to overcome the legacy of apartheid. I also had a connection through my grandfather, Papa Jim. In the 1960s, he had been appointed the first black minister in the more than three-hundred-year history of the Dutch Reformed Church, which was also the official religion of apartheid South Africa. He often told us about the racist death threats he received as his reward. After his appointment, church leaders asked him to lead a delegation of clergy to South Africa. Upon arriving in Johannesburg, he was informed by state security that the airport was as far as he would be allowed to go--he would not be permitted to leave the terminal. Eventually the party he was supposed to meet and stay with in South Africa had to come to him. They conducted their meeting in the airport terminal, where my grandfather prayed with them--for change, for hope, for unity, for forgiveness, for freedom. After that my grandfather promptly left that murderous regime and returned to America.