

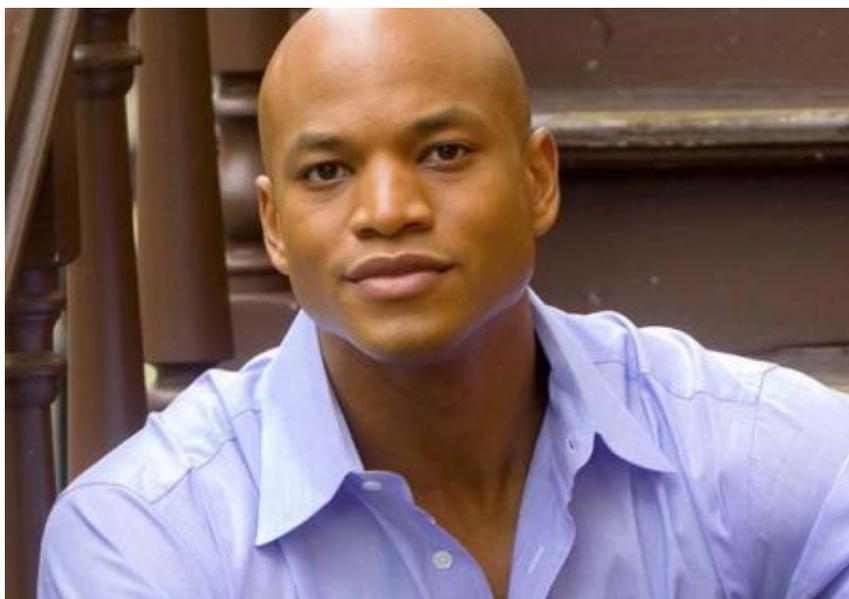


WORLDVIEWS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

A Monograph Series

The Impact of Human Resolve and the Power of One

A Conversation with Wes Moore



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Wes Moore
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The views expressed in this monograph are entirely those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the staff, officers or advisors of the Global Connections Foundation, the University of Central Florida's Global Perspectives Office or UCF's Political Science Department.

Program Offices:
University of Central Florida
Howard Phillips Hall, Room 202
4000 Central Florida Blvd.
P.O. Box 160003
Orlando, Florida 32816-0003
(407) 823-0935/0688
(407) 823-0716 (fax)
global@ucf.edu

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Q: Do inequality, poverty, lack of education and other challenges tend to produce similar societal results, regardless of the countries in which people live?

A: Absolutely. These are not American phenomena. You know the dynamic of disparities, the dynamic of gaps – education gaps, digital gaps, expectation gaps. These are not American dynamics alone.

Q: What can the United States contribute to the broader, global discussion regarding these gaps?

A: Not only do we need to realize that these are global conversations and that other countries are involved in them, but that we also have to understand what our role is in that global conversation. It isn't about meeting certain development levels. It's about asking, "What is our obligation?" There is a cherished beauty of being a true global partner and citizen.

Q: As a Rhodes scholar, or during your military service and other work abroad, was there one experience you had or a special relationship you forged that truly transformed you?

A: I'll tell you a story that refreshes the understanding of the human spirit and the power of one. I was in South Africa, studying abroad

and living in Langa, a part of Cape Town and one of the largest and oldest townships in South Africa. The townships, for those who may not be familiar with them, are places on the edges of towns and cities. During South Africa's apartheid period, these were generally underdeveloped areas where non-whites were forced to live. I stayed with a family in a traditional tribal setting, and they told me amazing stories about apartheid and the apartheid era. For example, the family patriarch was imprisoned and taken away for a very long time; after coming back, he was never the same. As Mama, my home-stay mother and a very forgiving soul, shared these stories, I had to interrupt her and say, "I'm so sorry. How do you forgive all of this?"

Q: In a political environment that was especially trying for the soul ...

A: Indeed. Her answer was complex and simple and beautiful all at the same time. She just looked at me and said, "Because President Nelson Mandela asked us."

Q: And Mandela had more reasons than most to be resentful about the apartheid system.

A: Yes. He was incarcerated for nearly 30 years, and spent many of them on Robben Island, a place famous in South African history for housing political detainees as well as convicted prisoners. Mandela was also partially blind after his release because they had him chopping limestone. If anybody had a right to be angry, it was Mandela. And, quite honestly, if you had talked to political scientists in the 1980s about which of two African countries – South Africa and Zimbabwe – would be a fledgling democracy and economic engine for the continent in a decade, most would have gotten it wrong. They would have picked Zimbabwe as the likely success story, and projected an utter mess for South Africa because its multiple tribes would be fighting for power after the lifting of apartheid. What would have been missing from that analysis was the impact of human resolve and its remarkable leader, Nelson Mandela.

Q: What are some of the other issues that concern you, and do you view them with optimism or pessimism?

A: First, I don't think there's anything that I don't view with optimism. I don't think I'm built that way, and I wouldn't want to be built any other way. I think that if we don't have a sense of optimism, and if we don't have a sense of hope in our hearts, then why are we here? So we have very real challenges, and the place to start is right here at home.

Q: What should be the priorities?

A: I think we have to do a better job of addressing what's happening with our environment. I think we have to do a better job of addressing what's happening with our criminal justice system, and specifically, our juvenile justice system. We're watching far too many good souls who are making bad decisions and are never able to rebound from them. The result is that we're losing a lot of long-term assets. I think we have to do a better job with our education system, not just K-12 but also higher education, and we need to put a much clearer focus on degree completion and career placement. All of this is going to take hard work. But that's part of the beauty of us being here. If we're not ready and willing to work hard, then why else would we be here?

Q: You clearly have many of the qualities that are needed to lead. Is a political path a potential option for the future?

A: I absolutely have an ambition to be a leader in our nation. I also don't feel like it has to come with a job title, though. I know people who don't have big titles and are doing absolutely amazing things on this planet. And I know people with very big titles who do absolutely nothing. And so I always say, "I love my job, and I don't want anybody else's." I know that impact, real impact, doesn't have a job description. It just has proof points. And my goal is hitting proof points and not necessarily trying to get a certain job. I don't

think that good work and a particular business card always equate in the same way. I'm more interested in those who are about the business of doing good things for other people.

Wes Moore is a youth advocate, an Army combat veteran, a social entrepreneur, and the host of "Beyond Belief" on the Oprah Winfrey Network. His first book, The Other Wes Moore, became an instant New York Times and Wall Street Journal bestseller. Despite early academic and behavioral struggles, he graduated Phi Theta Kappa in 1998 as a commissioned officer from Valley Forge Military College, and Phi Beta Kappa from The Johns Hopkins University in 2001, where he also played football and earned a bachelor's degree in International Relations. He then became a Rhodes Scholar, studying International Relations at Oxford University. After his studies, Moore, a paratrooper and Captain in the U.S. Army, served a combat tour of duty in Afghanistan with the 1st Brigade of the 82nd Airborne Division. He then served as a White House fellow to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. Moore is a member of the board of the Iraq Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) and The Johns Hopkins University, and founded an organization called STAND! that works with Baltimore youth involved in the criminal justice system. This interview was conducted by Worldviews Editor John C. Bersia on October 20, 2014.