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Wanted More from Moore

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Wanted More from Moore

Abstract

I was very excited when I first picked up Wes Moore's book *The Other Wes Moore*. After hearing that it was chosen as the common reading text for the incoming class, and also being given the opportunity to co-facilitate a discussion based on the book, I was even more excited.

However, as I read the book, I found myself more frustrated than fulfilled. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, The Other Wes Moore, black communities, race, family, identity, Liberal Multiculturalism

Disciplines

African American Studies | Community-Based Learning | Family, Life Course, and Society | Race and Ethnicity

Comments

Surge is a student blog at [Gettysburg College](https://cupola.gettysburg.edu) where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at surgegettysburg.wordpress.com Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, demonstrating that –isms are structural problems, not actions defined by individual prejudice. We intend to popularize justice, helping each other to recognize our biases and unlearn the untruths.

SURGE

[VERB] : to move suddenly or powerfully forward or upward

WANTED MORE FROM MOORE

September 24, 2014

I was very excited when I first picked up Wes Moore's book *The Other Wes Moore*. After hearing that it was chosen as the common reading text for the incoming class, and also being given the opportunity to co-facilitate a discussion based on the book, I was even more excited.



However, as I read the book, I found myself more frustrated than fulfilled. The book highlights the parallels between the lives of two young black boys who grew up in the same city, both sharing the same name: Wes Moore. The book was filled with many instances where we see systemic issues that promote inequalities and lack of privilege or resources influencing the lives of the two Wes's. My frustrations stemmed from the fact that it completely stops short of discussing these issues any further.

When I learned that the author would be giving a lecture at Gettysburg and I would have the opportunity to meet him, I was eager and felt I could use this chance to ask him questions about the book:

- What made him focus more on choices rather than addressing the systemic barriers like race, class, incarceration in Black communities and access to education – issues that were so evident in his book?
- How could he have created a balance between the two for the reader?

During his lecture, Moore again stressed the importance of choices. When I finally had the opportunity to ask him, he explained that his intentions with the book were to focus on the story of these two young boys and the parallels that existed between the two.

A week later, I still could not leave my disappointment behind. I recalled an article I had recently read for class that discussed [Liberal Multiculturalism](#), which is when “educational institutions have a powerful social responsibility to deconstruct the ideology of human inequality,” but that they often fall short by failing to “adequately or fully address the inequalities of power, resources and privilege.”

This description perfectly summarized my experience and feelings about the common reading program, but only added to my frustration.

During my years on campus, Gettysburg College has championed the ideas of “diversity,” “equity,” “access,” and “inclusion,” and so it was natural that I had expected the school to use this opportunity to further this discussion and to provide a stronger context for these terms.

“Since Wes Moore didn’t do it, then Gettysburg should,” I thought to myself.

Moore’s story appealed to students and the campus – it got us think about our choices, plans for our lives, and encouraged us to mentor and support others. These are all good things, but did it also have such an appeal because it promoted the notion of meritocracy? The idea that our choices shape the outcomes of our lives, that you can be anything you want if you make the right choices. The problem is that meritocracy is a myth. It overshadows and ignores key societal factors that have real power and influence over the lives of many.

By focusing on the choices did we miss an opportunity to have a conversation about the wider issues at play in the book?

Research demonstrates that NOT talking about race does not improve racial attitudes or biases. In [one study](#), racial biases actually decreased in children whose parents were open to talking about race, while the opposite was true for those who didn’t.

We already have a campus where talking about race, power and privilege make many feel uncomfortable. Being candid and open, and giving students the background knowledge about these issues can empower more conversation, which will in turn increase both understanding and empathy on our campus.

Some students may have touched on these points in their small group book discussion that followed Moore’s lecture as facilitators were free to direct the conversations. But, overall, key systemic issues were not emphasized.

To me, the common reading experience felt like one more example of Liberal Multiculturalism, failing to adequately address the issues to which the College says it is committed.

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