



fun. Enormous holes in the middle of major streets, say, or a drunken man dressed as an insect in line behind you at the convenience store.

Our challenge in the schools is to try to reform a broken system (the “recovery” in Recovery School District doesn’t refer to the storm — the district was created before Katrina, when the state took over the city’s failing schools) amidst a beautiful culture that is sometimes committed to cutting folks a little slack.

I have heard the following things speciously defended or excused by New Orleans culture: truancy, low test scores, drug and alcohol addiction, extended families showing up within the hour to settle minor school-boy scuffles, inept bureaucracy, lazy teachers, students showing up hungover the day after Mother’s Day

19.

Once, a girl’s older sister looked askance at one of my best students after school, and about five minutes later there was a full-on brawl in the parking lot. I lost my grip on the student I was holding back and she jumped on top of another student’s mother and started pounding.

On the pavement in front of me was a weave and a little bit of blood. One of my ninth graders was watching the chaos gleefully while I tried to figure out how to make myself useful. He was as happy as I’ve ever seen him. He shrugged beatifically. “This is New Orleans!” he shouted, to me, to himself, to anyone who might be listening.

20.

Sometimes my students tell me they are sick of talking about the storm. Sometimes it’s all they want to talk about. Might be the same student. Some students have told me it ruined their lives, some students have told me it saved their lives. Again, sometimes the same student will say both.

21.

From an interview in early 2006:

AllHipHop.com: On the album, did you ever contemplate doing a whole track dedicated to the Hurricane Katrina tragedy?



Lil Wayne: No, because I’m from New Orleans, brother. Our main focus is to move ahead and move on. You guys are not from New Orleans and keep throwing it in our face, like, ‘Well, how do you feel about Hurricane Katrina?’ I f—king feel f—ked up. I have no f—king city or home to go to. My mother has no home, her people have no home, and their people have no home. Every f—king body has no home. So do I want to dedicate something to Hurricane Katrina? Yeah, tell that b—h to suck my d—k. That is my dedication.

22. I am the beast! Feed me rappers or feed me beats.

Lil Wayne mentions Katrina in his songs from time to time. He has a track that rails against Bush for his response to the storm. But, to his credit, he doesn’t wallow in his city’s famous tragedy.

The world needs to be told, and reminded, of what happened here. But New Orleans is bigger and more spirited than the storm. So its favorite son can be forgiven for refusing to let it define him. For my students, Lil Wayne is good times and good memories, and enduring hometown pride. All they ask of him is to keep making rhymes, as triumphant and strange as the city itself.

23. Ever since I was little, I lived life numb

Michael stopped coming to school. His mother told me, “He’s a man 55 now. There’s nothing more I can do.”

Darius got kicked out for physically attacking a teacher.

I have lots of happy stories, so I don’t mean to dwell on these two, but I guess that’s just what teachers do in the summer months, replay the ones that got away.

24.

I read over this, and I got it all wrong. I fetishize disaster. I live in the best city in the world and all I can write about is hurricanes and dropouts.