

# THE PROCRASTINATOR

FROM THE GUYS BEHIND [THE AD HALL](#) AND [THE STORMY PRESENT](#)

## NON-SPECIFIC REGULAR EDITION

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## THE WAYS OF THE WORLD:

### IN WAYNE WE TRUST: A TEACHER'S TAKE ON LOUISIANA'S MARTIAN MESSIAH

RUSTY LEE

*Momma don't cry / Your son gone' handle his / I got 'em out the hood / And put 'em in the hills – "3Peat"*

As both a semi-serious music geek who reads Pitchfork and Tiny Mix Tapes everyday, and a middle-school teacher just outside of New Orleans, Louisiana, I am highly versed in the style-shaping intrigues of one Dwayne Michael Carter, Jr. If that name doesn't immediately ring a bell, perhaps it's because the gentleman in question is better known by one or more cheeky monikers: Tha Carter, Weezy F. Baby, Lilweezyana, or, to the masses... Lil' Wayne.

As rappers go, Wayne has essentially reinvented "the game," which is no easy task considering the caliber of artists who helped to write the playbook. Over the past 10 to 15 years, hip-hop icons like Snoop Dogg, Eminem, and Jay-Z have revolutionized the genre, establishing themselves as transcendent cultural titans – towering figures whose influence and relevance (not to mention wealth) extend far beyond mere beat-making and rhyme-spitting. These guys have their own television shows, star in autobiographical films, and even own major sports franchises. In short, they're heavy hitters with legitimate leverage in today's world.



Lil' Wayne, though, is an entirely new creature. (When he obscurely opined that, "We are not the same / I am a Martian," he wasn't exactly lying.) From his childhood as a freestyling phenom in the Hollygrove area of New Orleans, to his unspoken coronation as The Best Rapper Alive after the release of *Tha Carter III*, Weezy has forged a wholly unique path to mega-stardom. What's more, the particulars of his story – geography, personality, and success – cannot be ignored. They go a long way in explaining why he's Hero #1 among the students I teach.

Indeed, I would go so far as to say that Lil' Wayne is as ubiquitous in local youth culture as are stalwarts like MySpace, Popeyes Chicken, and LSU football. He simply *is* a part of everyone's everyday – a normal arm on the compass of consciousness.

Despite this one-of-a-kind station, however, even Mr. Carter is not immune from hip-hop's moral murkiness. Whether in the form of gangsta-rooted kill songs or sex-seeking booty anthems, rap music has always attracted society's most heated outrage; and even Young Money himself draws a lion's share of thunderous criticism.

Again, this is nothing new. In my younger days, it was Tipper Gore fighting for those now-familiar “Parental Advisory” labels; in recent years, it’s been Bill O’Reilly lambasting Pepsi for employing rapper Ludacris in its ad campaigns. To be sure, the stigma following rap music is a strong one – and I’m now caught smack-dab in the middle of its moral whirlwind.

You see – as a twenty-five-year-old teacher of adolescents in a low-income area, I grapple daily with the complex tension that resides in the gap between high expectations and appreciation for “small victories.” In other words, I tend to hope for enormous things... but often have to take what I can get. So, while I’d love for each and every one of my students to aspire to such high stations as law school or medicine, I honestly feel a wave of comforting contentment when they mention such short-term successes as graduating from high school. (It’s difficult to know whether that’s a good or a bad thing, eh?) When viewed through this peculiar and delicate lens, the Wayne Issue begs a subtly complex question: Should the tattooed, drug-using, female-demeaning rapper serve as a role model to Louisiana’s youth?

There is a large part of me – call him the idealistic intellectual – who feels that all of my students should adopt heroes who are successful, substantive, and (relatively) beyond moral reproach. I think that African-American adolescents, especially those in my daily environment who are classified as “at risk,” ought to have their perspectives flooded with positive images and messages. They should idolize Oprah Winfrey, Barack Obama, and Jerry Rice, individuals who have excelled in entertainment, politics, and athletics on their own merits, with laser-like determination and a world-class work ethic. What’s more, these are would-be role models who have both emboldened aspiring youngsters and sought to leave positive legacies in their respective realms of influence. Oprah showed us that a talk-show host can become a part of the cultural fabric; Barack Obama showed us that a poor interracial child can infiltrate the Ivory Tower and be chosen to lead his country; and Jerry Rice showed us that practice does indeed make perfect.

As it happens, though, these admirable individuals lack a vital element that is necessary to any hero equation: what I call *relatability*. While I would love for my students to admire the kinds of individuals mentioned above, I can’t *reasonably* expect such stories to resonate. On the whole, my students are educationally failed, economically challenged, and live in a severely stifling bubble. Many of them have never been outside of Louisiana; some of them have never even made the 30-mile journey to New Orleans. How can such kids be expected to internalize a version of success embodied by people who exist only on television? Think about it: for a 16-year-old in La Place, Louisiana, people like Oprah and Barack Obama essentially *aren’t real*; they’re characters in a story – a story of the world – which is in many ways as distant and detached as *High School Musical* or *Spongebob Squarepants*.

Not so with Wayne. Mr. Carter is a living, breathing paragon of success for the young people around this area – one of their own, born and raised in the Big Easy, who came from *this environment* and made it big. Scratch that: huge. A million copies of *Tha Carter III* sold in its first week of release – that’s 1,000,000 compact discs, in today’s age of digital larceny and iTunes. Give the man (make that Martian) his props.

Indeed, my 6<sup>th</sup>-graders can look squarely at Lil' Wayne and see a poor project kid from mere *miles away* who now sits atop the world. *He* grew up on rough streets; *his* family didn't have much; *he* was told he'd never amount to anything; and *he* overcame the odds. What do they care about Wayne's moral virtues? What does it matter, to them, whether or not Weezy uses this drug or that one? Simply put, he is a big fish who made it out of the small pond – and nothing else matters.

This is where everything becomes gray. As I stated earlier, I want my students to “reach for the stars,” so to speak. I want them to be driven, upright, drug-free, and principled. I want them to be productive, engaged citizens who live virtuous, admirable lives. On the other hand, I want them to *believe* in something; I want them to *own* the conviction that they can succeed. Ironically, the situation amounts to bona fide contradiction: in wanting these adolescents to adopt an Obama-like belief in hope, I'm left to rely on an individual who represents (in many ways) a complete U-turn from the qualities that are so impressively central to the President-elect's character.



I've given this issue a great deal of thought, and I continually come back to a fact that supplements the relatability argument: no one – that's right, no one – is perfect. Barack Obama has admitted to smoking and drug use; Kobe Bryant (Michael Jordan 2.0) cheated on his wife in a Colorado hotel; Reggie Bush spends his days with Kim Kardashian; and every other “famous” person seems to have one skeleton or another in the closet. Why, then, should I (or we as a society) choose to apply specific moral outrage to an individual who chooses to use promethazine and marijuana while singing about guns, easy women, and the thug life?

At the end of the day, Lil' Wayne gets my students excited. With every hit song, he convinces them anew that a poor black kid from Louisiana can attain better things for self and family. They might never remember a dozen words from a Presidential speech, but they can sure as heck recite every word of *Tha Carter III*. There's no clear-cut answer to this debate... but for now, I'm choosing to believe that there's beauty in reality. Perhaps (:gasp:) hope with shaky morality is better than morality with shaky hope.

*I live in the suburbs / But I come from the hood – “Don't Get It”*

*Rusty still buys CD's too, and can be reached at: [russellclee@gmail.com](mailto:russellclee@gmail.com)*

## THE WAYS OF THE WORLD:

“THE WORLD IS NOT DANGEROUS BECAUSE OF THOSE WHO DO HARM BUT BECAUSE OF THOSE WHO LOOK AT IT WITHOUT DOING ANYTHING” - ALBERT EINSTEIN

MICHAEL ORR

*Ich bin der Mann von Morgen und ich liebe fußball.* That is about as good as it gets from me in constructing a sentence in German without an online translator (and it means ‘I am the husband of Morgen and I love soccer’). But it didn’t have to be that way. In fact, there are many people who can probably say as I can that in relatively recent generations, members of their family gave up their native language, either voluntarily or involuntarily. It is interesting how America is viewed as the great ‘melting pot’ but at the same time we expect everyone to value ‘American culture’ above their own as long as they’re within these borders. I’m getting ahead of myself.

When my grandfather was a wee one living in Dubuque, Iowa in the late 1930s, his grandmother moved in with his family, as her health concerns could not be adequately addressed by the rest of her family living on the farms just outside of town. She immigrated to this country from Germany and naturally spoke German as her first language. She would speak German exclusively while in the kitchen with her daughters, including my great-grandmother. As a young child, my grandfather remembers them speaking the language though he never learned more than how to count to ten.

On December 7, 1941 the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor in Hawaii and across America, families of Japanese and German descent were thrown onto the defensive. As soon as they heard the news over the radio in Dubuque, my great-grandmother sat everyone down in her house and declared that no one would speak German in her house ever again. This must have saddened her greatly, it being the language of her parents and her family, customs and traditions. She had herself been baptized in a German service and the Lutheran church they attended had an all-German service prior to the English version. But she felt compelled to give up those parts of her life because she knew how the sentiments of ‘ordinary’ Americans would turn against all things German.

Even now, my grandfather rues that day, not just because of the terrible war it led this country into but because it took away the history and customs of his family, to which he was never allowed in because of his young age. From that day nearly sixty-seven years ago, America has been so focused on itself that countless families and communities have felt the need to abandon or reduce in some way their traditions and often their languages. Those decisions may not completely affect the adults making those choices because they will never forget their native tongue, but it does guarantee that their children will not carry forward those languages.

So all that leads me to today. Shouldn’t it be an ‘American’ value to have many, if not all of our citizens learn another language? This certainly is the case in many other countries around the world where it is at the very least a necessity, let alone a luxury, to know how to communicate with others. Often that language is English as it has spread as the language of business throughout the world. But either way, we should be encouraging children to learn French,

German, Italian, Arabic, Mandarin or Spanish. This is an increasingly global world where we are all likely to come in contact with people who may not know English. And even beyond that, it could be a gesture of good will toward citizens of other countries to come to their lands and speak to them in their own tongue.

My mother-in-law was born in Germany and still has family living in Franconia. I would like nothing more than to return the favor they have graciously given me which is to speak to me in my own language. That is the main reason I have tried to learn German. But a change in focus in this country could give the next generation of American children the chance to appreciate multiple cultures. Many children today grow up in areas where Spanish-speaking residents outnumber English-speaking and they are forced to learn Spanish just to keep up in their hometowns. In many ways, that is a great thing. When they grow up they will have more opportunities than those of us who were never given a reason to care about another language.

I don't have sweeping initiatives to increase budgets for foreign language courses in schools across America. In fact, I know there would be significant backlash to proposals that required children to learn a second language as youngsters. And that is too bad because it is the youngest of children who learn languages the easiest. It used to be that many children in this country were taught the languages of international interaction, French, German and probably Latin as well.



But as the power of this nation has increased, our willingness to embrace the ways of the world has decreased. Instead, we try to force our ways on everyone else, demand they speak English and without too much of an accent, if possible. Well it's time we started to rethink this brand of 'American pride' and start to give ourselves a kick in the direction of a world that has been accommodating us for far too long.

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## *SPORTS:*

### *TEN YEARS GONE*

*MICHAEL ORR*

Where has the time gone? I was just thinking the other day that it's been ten years since my first year of high school was completed. In the spring of 1998 I finished ninth grade. While there is no specific event that reminded me of this fact, I thought it worth noting just how different things are now then they were a decade ago. Oh, and this is a sports article, so nothing on the internet, Bill Clinton or Saving Private Ryan.

In 1998, Tiger Woods did not win a major. In fact, **Mark O'Meara** won two, the Masters and the British Open. In 1998, **France** won its first World Cup behind Zinedine Zidane, prompting over a million (non-protesting) French citizens onto the Champs-Élysées. In 1998, hockey still mattered and the **Detroit Red Wings** swept the Washington Capitals to win the Stanley Cup. In 1998, **Martina Hingis**, the Swiss Miss, won her fourth grand slam in the Australian Open over Conchita Martínez. In 1998, Dale Earnhardt won the Daytona 500 but **Jeff Gordon** won his third Winston Cup Series in four years while tying Richard Petty's modern record with thirteen victories. In 1998, Real Quiet won the Kentucky Derby and the Preakness but aptly named **Victory Gallop** stole the Belmont to deny a Triple Crown. In 1998, the Winter Olympics were held in Nagano, Japan.



In 1998, **Mark McGwire** and **Sammy Sosa** chased and broke Roger Maris' 37-year old home run record of 61 in one season. Cal Ripken, Jr. ended his streak of consecutive games played at 2632 and the **New York Yankees** won the second of their four titles in five years, sweeping the San Diego Padres.

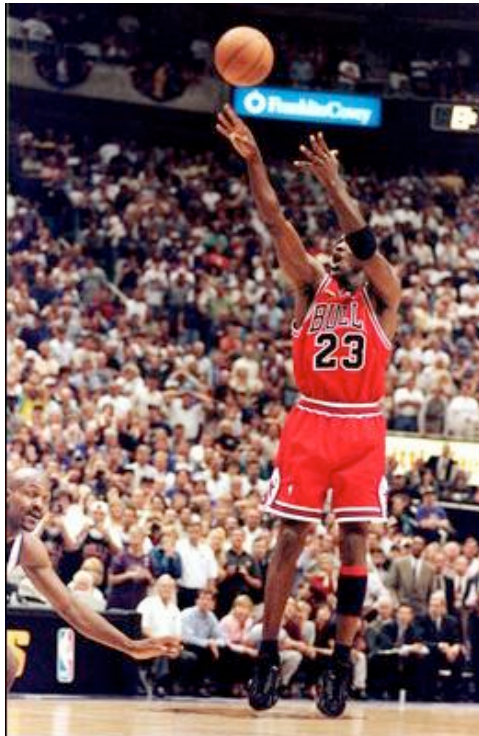
In 1998, Michael Jordan pushed Bryon Russell out of his way and drilled a jumper to give the **Chicago Bulls** their second three-peat of the decade and second straight NBA Finals victory over Karl Malone, John Stockton and the Utah Jazz. The league then locked out its players for the next six months.

In 1998, Tubby Smith led **Kentucky** to its second NCAA title in three years (and third straight title game) over Utah in San Antonio.

In 1998, John Elway finally earned a victory for the **Denver Broncos** in the Super Bowl upsetting the Green Bay Packers in Super Bowl XXXII in San Diego.

And in 1998, **Michigan** and **Nebraska** shared the last NCAA title prior to the Bowl Championship Series' introduction. #1 Michigan and Charles Woodson narrowly defeated Ryan Leaf and #8 Washington State in the Rose Bowl while #2 Nebraska thrashed #3 Tennessee in the Orange Bowl.

It's hard to believe it's been ten years since Michael Jordan was last on the Bulls or that we've been punished with the BCS for a decade. It's weird not to see names like Tiger Woods, Roger Federer and LeBron James mentioned. It's sad to see shamed athletes like Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa and amazing how easily we forget names like Martina Hingis, Mark O'Meara and Real Quiet.



In many ways, these events and names ring true in my head as if it were just a few days ago that they really mattered. But alas it has been ten years and everything has changed. From the Curse of the Bambino to hockey's importance, many of the certainties of a decade ago are ancient memories. Yet some things have not changed at all. There has been no Triple Crown winner, the Cubs still haven't won the World Series and college football still doesn't have a playoff.

It's hard to imagine what the next ten years will bring. Who would've thought in 1998 that the Tampa Bay Rays would be in the World Series or that the Olympics could be held in China? If you'd said the Red Sox would win two World Series but the Braves would not win any, who would've believed you? And if you'd thought Michael Jordan might come back with the Washington Wizards or that Mark McGwire wouldn't be in the Hall of Fame, you would've been labeled insane. So here's to sports and its never-ending ability to surprise and change.

*Michael knew most of this off the top of his head, and can be reached at: [mikeaorr@gmail.com](mailto:mikeaorr@gmail.com)*