The Department of Communication Arts and Sciences

Kanye West, Emotionality, & Individualism – Pioneering a Paradigm Shift Amongst Rap's Elite

Cory Steinle

The Pennsylvania State University

Abstract

By analyzing countless song lyrics, criminal data, and investigate interviews from popular rappers, I was able to draw the conclusion that Kanye West had a significant and quantifiable impact on the frequency of emotionality & individualism within popular rap music. His status as a celebrity allowed for the cathartic release of emotions throughout his music career to be labeled as "revolutionary.". At the time he released his freshman album, *The College Dropout* (2004), violence and hate were two emotions largely represented in the popular rap sphere. This was the aftermath of a previous decade of rap music besieged by violent, criminalistics themes inspired by rap's very best – Biggie, Tupac, Snoop Dogg, and N.W.A. However, with Kanye's new "pink polo" Chicago style, he was successfully able to enter the marketplace with a unique, individualistic style and sound. Themes of individualism and healthy emotionality can be found throughout his career, from his 2002 single "Through the Wire" through his seventh solo studio album, The Life of Pablo (2016). He stayed true to these themes throughout his first three studio albums, but it was his fourth album, 808's & Heartbreak, that truly shifted the paradigm of rap music. This album cemented West's place in history as one of the most influential artists of his time, inspiring many of his peers to adopt similar styles and motives as his own. West effectively shifted the paradigm from the dark, criminal ages of 1990's gangster rap to a much lighter, more individualistic modern era by focusing his lyricism on emotionality and truer sense of himself, his motives, and his beliefs.

Keywords: male emotionality, individualism, lyricism, rhetoric.

Kanye West, Emotionality, & Individualism – Pioneering a Paradigm Shift Amongst Rap's Elite

Kanve West is one of the single most recognizable names in America. He considers himself one of the greatest artists to ever live. In a 2013 interview with Sway Calloway, he claimed, "I am Warhol. I am the number one most impactful artist of our generation." West has frequently been a figure of controversy through his stardom, beefing with pop culture goliaths such as country singer Taylor Swift, dope-slinging underground rapper Wiz Khalifa, and most recently, indie-pop musician Beck. While Kanye is a polarizing figure, he always speaks his mind freely, regardless of anybody else's opinion, which was an irregularity compared to his predecessors in the 1990's. When rap popularized as an art-form in the late 1980's, the overall focus of the industry was very negative, primarily oriented around criminality, violence, and masculinity (McNulty-Finn, 2014). Throughout his career, Kanye West has functioned as an ambassador for a greater paradigm shift away from these stigmatizing notions and towards a more accepting and inclusive culture that encourages open emotional discourse amongst rap artists. While he did provide an impressive array of positive emotional and individualistic themes throughout his first three studio albums, it was his fourth album, 808's & Heartbreak, that transformed the rap genre. Kanye West has inspired a completely new generation of hip-hop legends – Drake, J Cole, Kendrick Lamar, and Chance the Rapper – to stray from the negative, distanced themes associated with rap music, and towards a new rap frontier that focuses on the power and importance of the individual.

Shifting the Paradigm: The Pre-Kanye Era.

Rap music originated in 1970's New York, where DJ's performed at "house parties" to provide a synthesized platform for MC's to read a spoken vocal (Baughman, 2001). Throughout the decade, rap progressed to include break-dancing, jiving, and other dance moves. In this time,

rap was light-hearted. Rappers such as Run-DMC would produce songs like "My Adidas" that simply celebrated footwear. However, in the 1980's, the genre became much more civically minded. In response to the failure of the Reagan administration to curb overt racism and violence against the black community, rap groups such as Public Enemy took militant, seemingly anti-white stances in their songs (Baughman, 2001). By the turn of the decade, rap music had become a hostile culture plagued by violent themes.

According to Harvard Political Review, by the 1990's, even the most financially successful rappers, "wrote about violence, crime, and living in poverty...rap was the story of ghetto life and the anthem of gangsters." The most popular rap songs, such as Geto Boys' "Mind's Playin' Tricks on Me," focused heavily on the street-tough culture recognized in innercity neighborhoods. Willie D's verse in the song asks, "Is it that fool that I ran off the block? Or is it that nigga last week that I shot? Or is it the one I beat for \$5,000?" all of which not only condone, but exalt the idea of a violent, criminal-driven lifestyle. These same themes are reflected through the album art of the most successful rap albums in the 1990's. On the culture magazine Complex's list of "The 90 Best Rap Albums of the 1990's," The Notorious B.I.G.'s number eleven ranked *Life After Death* features album artwork of a hearse, reflecting the sense of futurelessness associated with the criminal rapper lifestyle (Blanchard, 1999). The artwork for the #15 self-titled album by Cypress Hill (1991) depicts three shadily-clad men, presumably in an ally, with a nearby garbage can on fire, seemingly glorifying this sort of "tough image" among males. Most notably, number four on the list, Raekwon's Only Built 4 Cuban Linx (1994) depicts two young black males wearing baggy clothing, chains, and a backwards hat – all of which have been associated with the tough, gangster lifestyle during the late 1990's and early 2000's (Blanchard, 1991) – shrouded in some sort of smoke, clutching a wine bottle.

Not only does the content of these rappers reflect industry-wide favorable attitudes of criminality and toughness, but the rhetoric used and actions reciprocate these same themes. The most popular rappers of the 1990's had distinct and well-known violent criminal records. The Notorious B.I.G., the number one rapper of the 1990's according to *Complex's* list of "The 10" Best Rappers of the 1990's" (Bly, 2013), had a string of robberies, violent assaults, and accusations of other violent crime. Jay-Z, number five on the list, was a known coke dealer, and had other accusations of criminal misconduct, including stabbing a man. Number eight on the list, Snoop Dogg, was once charged for murder, but was later acquitted (Montaldo, 2006). These artists further exemplified their criminality through the rhetoric of their album and song titles. Snoop Dogg titles from the 1990's include "Murder Was the Case," "2 of Amerikaz Most Wanted," and "Serial Killa." Jay-Z titled some of his works, "Dead Presidents," "Is That Yo Bitch?" and "Black Gangster." The Notorious B.I.G. used titles such as "Mo Money Mo Problems," "Ten Crack Commandments," and "Notorious Thugs." All three of these popular 1990's rappers used rhetoric to characterize their experiences as criminal and tough, greatly limiting their audience to demographics approving of these themes.

Emerging From the Ashes – Kanye's Rise to Prominence

In the 1990's, the paradigm was clear – criminality and a reputation for toughness was a prerequisite for success in the rap industry (Baughman, 2001). As an artist, Kanye West was arguably the first majorly-popular rapper to deviate from this paradigm. Kanye was born to highly influential parents. His father, Ray West, was a photojournalist and ex-Black Panther. His mother, Donda West, was a professor of English at a Chicago University (Rolling Stone, "Kanye West Biography"). As a kid, Kanye grew up writing raps and producing beats. He hailed from the south-side of Chicago, a poverty-stricken area with high rates of criminality. When asked

about his adolescence by *Complex* in 2002, Kanye responded, "We was gangbanging in kindergarten...that's how Chicago is...so basically, my main focus became music. I've been making tracks since the seventh grade." He first found success as a producer after dropping out of college, a decision that inspired him to name his first studio album *The College Dropout* (2004). Kanye primarily achieved name-recognition in working with long-time friend and rapper Jay-Z, a tough Brooklynite and thug character, by producing the beats for "This Can't Be Life" (2000) and a third of the 15 tracks on *The Blueprint* (2001). Seemingly having found his groove, Kanye, felt immortal (Rolling Stone, "Kanye West Biography") until he barely survived a serious car accident in 2002.

Just outside of Lose Angeles, West crashed into head-on traffic coming home from the studio at three in the morning (Reid, 2002). He was rushed to Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, which is the same hospital that rap legend Biggie Smalls died, which he notes in *The College Dropout*. Doctors wired West's broken jaw shut and treated him for a few other minor injuries. Just two short weeks later, West recorded his first rap single "Through the Wire" which would peak at #15 on the Billboard top 100 and later become one of the most famous songs on his 2004 debut album, *The College Dropout* (Howard, 2014), which went double-platinum. In "Through the Wire," Kanye goes the entire first verse without once cursing, a move unique to rap in the early 2000's. At that time, it wasn't uncommon for hardline rappers such as Eminem swore as many as 21 times in the first verse of a song (*It's Girls*, "Devil's Night").

Holistically, "Through the Wire" was a song rooted in individualism, written and performed by an artist characterized by transformation. Apart from the content of *The College Dropout*, the symbolic album-artwork and Kanye's personal sense of fashion further distanced him from traditional gangster rappers. Rather than wearing the baggy clothes and gold chains

characterized by the album artwork of 1990's rappers, Kanye often wore his favorite pink polo. As Rap Genius suggests on the "Through the Wire" annotation page, "the pink polo pretty much sums up what Kanye represented upon his debut – [he] was a dorky backpack rap prodigy rather than another one of the crack-slinging gangsters dominating the airwaves." In addition to fashion, Kanye's album artwork deviated greatly from that of the famed rappers before him (Pasori, 2013). Rather than featuring images reminiscent of crime, the artwork for *The College Dropout*, his second studio album *Late Registration (2005)*, and his third studio album *Graduation (2007)* featured his bear mascot, an icon highly symbolic of Kanye's personal life.

All three of these albums rhetorically focus on individualism and positive emotionality. Apart from lyrics, the simple fact that West had claimed eleven Grammy's from three studio albums reflected that he was changing the game ("Kanye West," 2016). Even if one was to ignore that fact, from a lyrical perspective, songs such as "Jesus Walks" from the album *The College Dropout*, which eventually won him a Grammy, exemplified the individualistic and positive focuses Kanye so willfully employed, contraire to the precedent for toughness standardized in the 1990's. Jesus Walks peaked at fourth on the charts and stands proud at 19th on *Rolling Stone's* "100 Best Songs of the 2000's." More significantly, it was nominated for "Best Gospel Song" during the 2005 BET awards (Beaumont, 2015). In the song, Kanye is incredibly emotional and introspective about his definition of godliness. He claims that Jesus walks with "the hustlers, killers, murderers, drug dealers, even the strippers..." and comments on the negative stigma of emotionality among his industry, claiming, "If I talk about God my record won't get played, huh?" This distinctive approach to lyricism was a very new development when *The College Dropout* was released.

Kanye's unorthodox lyrics aren't just unique to "Jesus Walks." Songs such as "All Falls Down" from *The College Dropout* focus on Kanye's own individual issues, a rarity among rappers at the time (Howard, 2015). In this song, Kanye directly quotes, "Man I promise, I'm soself conscious." Further, in *Late Registration*, Kanye writes a song about his mother, speaking fervently on accord of her character. He says things that many loyal rap fans could perceive to be "soft," such as "And I love you for that, mommy can't you see?" and admitting that when his mother was cheated on, "I started to cry," a sort of confession unthinkable during the 1990s.

Then, in *Graduation*, Kanye continued to demonstrate his emotional feelings. In "I Wonder," Kanye ponders, "I wonder if you know what it means to find your dreams." In "Everything I Am," he admits that "everything I'm not has made me everything I am." Lastly, in "Champion," the chorus asks Kanye's loyal fans, "Did you realize that you were a champion in their eyes?" The lyrics from all of these songs echoed salient themes of emotional well-being, positivism, and individualism.

The Defining Album: 808's & Heartbreak

Despite this success, no one moment more sharply defines the paradigm shift as well as his fourth studio album, 808's and Heartbreak. This album was revolutionary, shifting the paradigm in two senses – it set a strong precedent for emotionality amongst male rappers and further blurred the line between singing and rapping (Schiff, 2015). The album strayed from both the bass-booming, traditional rap sound of the 1990s and the string orchestration Kanye had used during previous albums. Instead, the album utilized the human voice as an instrument to create a very dark, ominous tone.

The album was produced in just two weeks by a grieving West following the death of his mother, Donda West, for whom he had a very close relationship with, and the love of his life,

Alexis Pfifer. Both of these events occurred in 2007 following the release of *Graduation*. These tragedies were unexpected – his mother died of complications following a routine cosmetic surgery and Alexis Pfifer was Kanye's fiancé (Green, 2015). During a 2013 interview with the New York Times, West explained that "great art comes from pain." West's pain was impulsive and sporadic, but reflective. His lines in "Heartless" are raw emotional impulses, but are so rhetorically sound that one can't help but empathize with West's burden. He summates his experience with Alexis Pfifer as, "Somewhere far along this road, he [West] lost his soul, to a woman so heartless" and details the suffering that has ensued as voices inside of his head torturing him, claiming "In the night I hear them talk, the coldest story ever told."

This raw emotionality was unprecedented at its time. These losses made Kanye not only reflect on his relationships with these two women, but on his own actions and worldview. In "Welcome to Heartbreak" from 808's & Heartbreak, Kanye opens with the line, "My friend showed me pictures of his kids, and all I could show him was pictures of my cribs." This idea is powerful, and rich in emotion. At this point, Kanye is rejecting the lavish materialism that characterized him as a cultural icon, and instead, takes a moment to examine the very foundations in which he bases himself. In "Love Lockdown," from the same album, West explains that in regards to love, "I've been down this road way too many times before." This kind of open emotional discourse was radical at its time, with Rolling Stone claiming that "[808's & Heartbreak] served as a new template for up-and-comers in hip-hop and R&B" and named it the most recent album on it's list of the the "40 Most Groundbreaking Albums of All Time" (Guthrie). Even with it's radical nature, the album went platinum based on the Recording Industry Association of America's criteria. 808's & Heartbreak set a precedent – that rappers could record an entire album speaking exclusively to their emotion state and still be successful.

Potent lyricism was not the only revolutionary aspect of 808's & Heartbreak. This album revolutionized the way we view rappers' as vocalists. The most distinguishing feature of vocalism in this album is that West chose to vocally modulate his voice. Related to the message of the album, Kanye did this to make himself sound coldly emotional; the tone of his voice reflects an unsettling inner conflict of a man who doesn't know how to feel (Green, 2015). He sounds inhuman, in the sense that he uses auto-tune to distance the voice of his current distress from the voice of the normal, happy, healthy Kanye that wrote *The College Dropout, Late Registration, and Graduation.* Kanye would later return to his normal voice in raw, hard-hitting songs such as *Yeezus's* "New Slaves" (2013) and *The Life of Pablo's* "I Love Kanye" (2016), but still utilized his dystopian, auto-tuned vocals in songs such as *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy's* "Runaway" (2010) that continued to highlight his emotional distress.

With this album, the "old Kanye" was dead. For his fourth album, he had originally planned to release a work entitled *Good Ass Job*, detailing how great his was for achieving rap greatness (Green, 2015). However, his personal anguish led him to release 808's and Heartbreak instead. During an interview cited in Green's article, West, speaking on behalf of 808's and Heartbreak, said "Hip-hop is over for me now. From now on, I want to be seen alongside only the musicians you see in the old black-and-white photographs – Jimi Hendrix, the Rolling Stones, the Beatles." This mentality wholly benefitted Kanye's future work on My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy (2010), Watch the Throne (2011), Cruel Summer (2012), Yeezus (2013), and The Life of Pablo (2016), but it also greatly affected the work of the artists around him. Kanye effectively shifted the paradigm, overcoming the stigma of emotion in the rap community and sending a message to all rappers that they too could succeed in capturing raw

emotion, a message that many rappers took to heart.

Curating a New Generation of Thought

Several new, millennial artists cite Kanye West as a creative inspiration. He's one of a kind, and most notably, the first of his kind, as he states in *The Life of Pablo's* "I Love Kanye," "See I invented Kanye, there wasn't any Kanyes, and now I look and look around and there's so many Kanyes!" While arrogance and self-awareness have been problems for Kanye in the past, he's not wrong in saying that there are now many "Kanyes" in the industry. Drake, said to be worth \$38.5 million dollars ("Hip Hop Cash Kings 2016," Forbes), reached outstanding success with his sophomore album, *Take Care* (2011). In this album, we see Drake's inner conflict between the luxury rapper lifestyle of sex, drugs, and violence highlighted in 1990's rap, and the agonizing emotions he feels for woman. In "Make Me Proud," his chorus echoes, "I'm so I'm so I'm so I'm so I'm so proud of you," while in "Take Care," he makes the claim that he's "dealing with a heart that [he] didn't break" and "I'll be there for you, I will care for you." Drake strikes a different chord than Kanye, but still expresses Kanye's nous of raw emotionality. In 2009, Drake said that Kanye was 'the most influential person' in shaping his sound and that "I'd even go as far as to say he's the most influential person as far as a musician that I'd ever had in my life" (Rodriguez 2009).

Drake was not the only artist affected by Kanye's revolutionary 808's and Heartbreak. Young rapper Future saw Kanye's auto-tuned voice as an opportunity to effectually convey genuine emotion. As the article on AXS concludes, "No one quite blurs the line [between singing and rapping] like Atlanta's future, who doesn't really fit comfortably into either designation" (Schiff, 2015). In the same sense that Kanye recorded 808's and Heartbreak after a breakup, Future recorded three projects shortly after breaking up with his fiancé Ciara in 2014 ("Future,"

Billboard). In these projects, his distinctly auto-tuned voice resonates well, sending cries of distress to the listener in a similar fashion to what Kanye did on tracks such as "Love Lockdown."

Prominent rappers like Kendrick Lamar, a man whose 2015 *To Pimp a Butterfly* competes directly with Kanye's *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy* as one of the greatest rap albums of the 2000's (King, 2016), admire Kanye West. When speaking of West's famous tirades on stage, Lamar said, "Those things that people call 'rants' on stage are real conversation that we have had behind closed doors" (Stubbs, 2014). He went on to add that "Kanye West taught me to never have any boundaries." Prominent rapper J Cole suggested his respect for West through a tweet, saying "Kanye West is one of the greatest artists of our generation." He further backed this claim by releasing his sophomore album, *Born Sinner* (2013) on the same day as Kanye's *Yeezus*, to try to directly compete with Kanye West, establishing a parallel between artistic power of both of their messages ("Forbidden Fruit," *Genius*). However flattering these artists may be to Kanye, no one is more indebted to Kanye than Chicago's very own Chance the Rapper.

Chance the Rapper is undoubtedly the best new rapper in the community (Emmanuel, 2016), and he wholeheartedly thanks Kanye West for teaching him to have vision. In 2016, he won the best new hip-hop artist award from BET. Chance was popularized from his 2016 mixtape *Coloring Book*, which, for the first time in rap history, is a mixtape primarily centered around one man – God. Chance is so emotionally confident in his savior that in "Blessings (Reprise)," he boasted, "I speak to God in public, he keeps my rhymes in couplets." Religion aside, he still possesses the same emotionality Kanye coined during 808's & Heartbreak, rapping, "I'm pre-currency, post language, anti-label, pro-famous, I'm Broadway Joe Namath.

Kanye's best prodigy, he ain't sign me but he proud of me." The two have become close friends over time (Mench, 2016), collaborating on West's *The Life of Pablo* and Chance's *Coloring Book*. Chance was featured on West's "Ultralight Beam," writing one of the most influential verses of all time (Mench, 2016). In this verse, Chance effortlessly casts his vision for the kairos of modern rap. He details his plans to release all of his music for free, boasts that "I met Kanye West, I'm never going to fail," and appeals to the listener's emotions, claiming about his persona, "there ain't one gosh darn part you can't tweet." Kanye agrees, having called Chance in 2016 "one of my favorite people" (Mench 2015).

As an artist, West has demonstrated a notable record of speaking on behalf of his emotions, with his first three studio albums all demonstrating his capacity to speak freely. Kanye West put himself out there in the rap community, risking it all with the revolutionary 808's and Heartbreak to make a lasting impression on individualism in the public sphere. This album marks a distinguishable paradigm shift away from the criminal messages of 1990's rap and towards a community that fosters expressive art-forms and an inclusive, emotional culture. From this album, a new breed of modern artists was born that have continued to reverberate emotional & individualistic themes. Today, it's reassuring to know that the most popular rappers are preaching positive messages of empowerment to our youth.

References

- @JColeNC. (2013, 20 May). Tweet text. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/jcolenc/status/336505198041999360?lang=en.
- Baughman, Judith S. (2001). Hip-Hop Culture. *American Decades* (Vol. 9). Retrieved November 2, 2016 from

http://go.galegroup.com/ps/retrieve.do?docId=GALE|CX3468302945&docType=GALE.

- Beaumont, Mark. (2015). Kanye West God & Monster. The Associated Press.
- Bennett, Chancellor J. (2016, May 13). Coloring Book [mixtape]. No Record Label.
- Billboard. (2016). Future [web]. Retrieved November 6, 2016 from http://www.billboard.com/artist/302577/future/chart?page=1&f=379
- Blanchard, Becky. (1999). The Social Significance of Rap & Hip-Hop Culture. *Stanford University Web Press*. Retrieved on November 6, 2016 from http://web.stanford.edu/class/e297c/poverty_prejudice/mediarace/socialsignificance.htm.
- Bry, D. Russel, A., Drake, D., X, D., & Kamer, F. (2013, October 23). The 10 Best Rappers of the '90s. *Complex* [web]. Retrieved November 1, 2016 from http://www.complex.com/music/2013/10/best-90s-rappers/ --.
- Calloway, Sway. (Interviewer) & West, Kanye. (Interviewee). 2013. *Kanye West and Sway Talk Without Boundaries: Raw and Real on Sway in the Morning* [interview video]. Retrieved from YouTube.
- Charity, J. Scott, D., Tharpe, F., Diz, A., Diep, E., Davis, J., & Mench, C. (2015, September 10).

 20 Rappers Who Are Influencing Rap Right Now. *Complex* [web]. Retrieved

 November 1, 2016 from http://www.complex.com/music/2015/09/20-rappers-who-are-influencing-rap-right-now –

- Cleveland, L. (2013, June 21). The Kanye God Complex. *CNN* [web]. Retrieved from http://www.cnn.com/2013/06/20/showbiz/music/kanye-west-god-complex-yeezus/
- Cole, Jermaine Lamarr. (2013, June 18). Forbidden Fruit [featuring Kendrick Lamar]. *Born Sinner* [digital download]. New York, New York; Los Angeles, California: Dreamville, Roc Nation, Columbia.
- Complex. (2014, April 23). The 90 Best Rap Albums of the '90's. Web. Retrieved November 1, 2016 from http://www.complex.com/music/2014/04/the-90-best-rap-albums-of-the-90s/.
- Emmanuel, C.M. (2016, October 4). Chance the Rapper Wins Best New Hip-Hop Artist at 2016

 BET Hip-Hop Awards XXL. XXL [web]. Retrieved from

 http://www.xxlmag.com/news/2016/10/chance-the-rapper-best-new-hip-hop-artist-2016-bet-hip-hop-awards/.
- Forbes. (2016). Hip-Hop Cash Kings 2016. Retrieved on November 1, 2016 from http://www.forbes.com/hip-hop-cash-kings/#6c875dd7c912.
- *Genius.* (2016). Interview With Kanye West. Retrieved on November 6, 2016 from http://genius.com/Complex-interview-with-kanye-west-annotated.
- Geto Boys. (2010). Mind Playing Tricks On Me. *Genius*. Retrieved from http://genius.com/Geto-boys-mind-playing-tricks-on-me-lyrics.
- Graham, Aubrey (Drake). W. W. (2011, November 15). *Take Care* [CD]. New Orleans, Louisiana: Young Money, Cash Money, Republic.
- Green, Jason. (2015, September 22). The Coldest Story Ever Told: The Influence of Kanye West's 808's & Heartbreak. *Pitchfork*. Retrieved November 2, 2016 from

- http://pitchfork.com/features/overtones/9725-the-coldest-story-ever-told-the-influence-of-kanye-wests-808s-heartbreak/.
- Guthrie, Woody. The 40 Most Groundbreaking Albums of All Time. *Rolling Stone* [web]. Retrieved on November 2, 2016 from http://www.rollingstone.com/most-groundbreaking-albums-of-all-time/.
- Howard, Michael. (2014, February 10). Kanye West Reflects on Debut Album 'The College Dropout' 10 Years Later. *ABC* [web]. Retrieved on November 6, 2016 from http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/entertainment/2014/02/kanye-west-reflects-on-debut-album-the-college-dropout-10-years-later/.
- Kanye West. (2016). Retrieved November 1, 2016 from http://www.grammy.com/artist/kanye-west.
- King, Brandon. (2016, April 21). Best Hip Hop Albums of the Millennium (2000-2015). *Hip Hop Golden Age* [web]. Retrieved on November 6, 2016 from http://hiphopgoldenage.com/list/best-hip-hop-albums-millennium-2000-2015/.
- Lamar, Kendrick. W. W. (2015, March 15). *To Pimp a Butterfly* [vinyl]. Carson, California; Santa Monica, California: Top Dawg, Aftermath, Interscope Records.
- McNulty-Finn, C. (2014 April 10). The Evolution of Rap Harvard Political Review.

 Retrieved November 1, 2016 from Beat of the Drum: The Music Issue,

 http://harvardpolitics.com/covers/evolution-rap/.
- Mench, C. (2016, May 16). Kanye West Calls Chance the Rapper "One of My Favorite People." *Complex* [web]. Retrieved November 2, 2016 from http://www.complex.com/music/2016/05/kanye-west-calls-chance-the-rapper-one-of-my-favorite-people.

- Montaldo, C. (2006, March 17). Mugshots of Rap, HipHop, and R&B stars. Retrieved November 1, 2016 from *News & Issues* at http://crime.about.com/od/famousdiduno/ig/mugshots rap hip rb/.
- Rodriguez, Jason. (2009, May 27). Drake Says Kanye West is 'The Most Influential Person' on his sound. *MTV* [web]. Retrieved November 6, 2016 from http://www.mtv.com/news/1612262/drake-says-kanye-west-is-the-most-influential-person-on-his-sound/.
- Rolling Stone (2011, June 17). 100 Best Songs of the 2000's. Retrieved November 1, 2016 from http://www.rollingstone.com/music/lists/100-best-songs-of-the-aughts-20110617.
- Rolling Stone. (2016). Kanye West Biography. Retrieved November 1, 2016 from http://www.rollingstone.com/music/artists/kanye-west/biography.
- Pasori, Cedar; McDonald, Leighton. (2013, June 17). The Design Evolution of Kanye West's Album Artwork. *Complex* [web]. Retrieved November 1, 2016 from http://www.complex.com/style/2013/06/the-design-evolution-of-kanye-wests-album-artwork/.
- Ramirez, Erika. (2014, February 5). Kanye West's 'The College Dropout': An Oral History.

 Billboard [web]. Retrieved on November 6, 2016 from
 http://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/the-juice/5893976/kanye-wests-the-college-dropout-an-oral-history.
- Recording Industry Association of America. (2016). Kanye West: 808's & Heartbreak [web].

 Retrieved November 6, 2016 from http://www.riaa.com/goldplatinum/?tab_active=defaultaward&se=Kanye+West+808%27s+%26+Heartbreak#searc h_section.

- Ried, Shaheem. (2002). Kanye West Injured in L.A. Accident. *MTV* [web]. Retrieved on November 6, 2016 from http://www.mtv.com/news/1458308/kanye-west-injured-in-la-accident/.
- Schiff, M. (2015, November 24). Five Artists That Wouldn't Exist Without Kanye West's "808s & Heartbreak." *AXS* [web]. Retrieved November 1, 2016 from https://www.axs.com/news/five-artists-that-wouldn-t-exist-without-kanye-west-s-808s-heartbreak-70844.
- Stubbs, D. (2014, January 24). Kendrick Lamar: "Kanye West taught me to never have any boundaries." *NME* [web]. Retrieved November 1, 2016 from http://www.nme.com/news/music/kendrick-lamar-126-1245430.
- West, Kanye. W. W. (2004, February 10). Through the Wire. *The College Dropout* [CD]. New York, New York: Roc-A-Fella Records.
- West, Kanye. W. W. (2005, August 30). *Late Registration* [CD]. New York, New York: Roc-A-Fella Records, Def Jam Recordings.
- West, Kanye. W. W. (2007, September 11). *Graduation* [CD]. New York, New York: Roc-A-Fella Records, Def Jam Recordings.
- West, Kanye. W. W. (2008, November 24). 808s & Heartbreak [CD]. New York, New York: Roc-A-Fella Records, Def Jam Recordings.
- West, Kanye. W. W. (2010, November 22). *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy* [vinyl]. New York, New York: Roc-A-Fella Records, Def Jam Recordings.
- West, Kanye; Carter, Shawn. W. W. (2011, August 8). *Watch the Throne* [CD]. New York, New York: Roc-A-Fella Records, Roc-Nation, Def Jam Recordings.

- West, Kanye. W. W. (2013, June 18). *Yeezus* [digital download]. New York, New York: Roc-A-Fella Records, Def Jam Recordings.
- West, Kanye. W. W. (2016, February 14). *The Life Of Pablo* [digital-subscription]. New York, New York: GOOD, Roc-A-Fella Records, Def Jam Recordings.
- *Genius*. (2016). Interview with Kanye West. Retrieved on November 6, 2016 from http://genius.com/Complex-interview-with-kanye-west-annotated.